Playing God With No Money

The Making of the Film *One Day Like Rain*

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by

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To Mom

Dad

William

and Paul,

with eternal gratitude.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express extreme gratitude to my parents, Carmine and Lydia Todisco, for believing in this book as they believe in life itself.

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The names of some of the participants have been changed to protect their privacy.

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Part 1

Chapter 1

Closed Doors Creaking Open

The tender words we said to one another
are stored in the secret heart of heaven:
one day like rain they will fall and spread,
and our mystery will grow green over the world.

–Jalal-ad-Din Rumi,

translated by Andrew Harvey

"...the only people for me are the mad ones,
the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved,
desirous of everything at the same time,
the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing,
but burn, burn, burn..."

–Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

Lights began to emerge from a blanket of darkness, and then the thunder hit. It grew louder, like a rolling wave, a crescendo from all directions. I looked at the people around me for a frozen second, and in my amazement, realized that they were conjuring the thunder with their bare hands. The spell broke and I began clapping like a girl possessed. The thunder around me was applause.

Paul appeared like a Magus, walking down the left aisle of the movie theater and mounting the stage with smooth, light steps. *One Day Like Rain* had just premiered at the 2007 Seattle Film Festival to a full house. Paul spoke into the microphone, thanking the audience for attending as he scanned the rows of people in the dim lighting, and offered to answer any

questions about the film. He stood there grinning, smartly dressed in a black Italian suit, radiating an innocence far removed from the common venality associated with Hollywood as he was not here only to promote his film, but to open a door to his world and bid us welcome. As that door opened, this is what we saw.

Something tangible hung in the air, something fresh and crackling, like the smell of ozone laden with negative ions after a thunderstorm has baptized the countryside. A sort of electricity sizzled in the atmosphere that awakened a remote, dormant seed of the spirit, announcing spring, making the hairs on the back of our necks stand on end. Something was about to burst forth and pour through. We all felt it, my mother, my father, my brother and I; we sensed that creation was coming, that it was inevitable.

Paul and I have always been obsessively creative. As children we would spend hours in the basement or in our back yard weaving our own world of characters, taking on other personas, or spying on the neighbors. We didn't need anything to defy time and place, no toys and no television to baby-sit us: just each other's company and the instant magic of our collective imagination.

When Paul was twelve, he bought a VCR with his own money that he had saved from his allowance. His whole will and purpose revolved around that VCR. Even then, he knew it was a magic portal. He knew it would be an important key, a talisman, a transmitter of his destiny.

When *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* came out on VHS, Paul had been waiting for it for months, counting the days until its release with yearning in his soul. The store where he was going to buy it suddenly experienced a delay in getting it in, and Paul was devastated, restarting his countdown for the new date of arrival. When the final hours and then minutes rolled around, he convinced our mother to take him to the store with sheer, unabashed desperation, where he finally purchased the film in a state of total elation. Back at home, Paul put the movie on, and his state of ecstasy and disbelief at his good fortune was so great that he blacked out watching the film from sheer emotional rapture.

Five years later Paul entered a degree program in Cinema-Television at the University of Southern California on a partial scholarship and, after graduating, directed a feature film called *Freak Talks About Sex*. This film was Paul's first child. It was brought into the world through

three long years of labor, from Paul's inner vision into external physical reality, with the help of many others along the way.

It was not long before Paul found a second project. He decided to make a film based on the Joseph Heller novel, *Something Happened*. He and his writing partner, Ethan Gross, adapted the book into a screenplay; not an easy task given that the material is so psychological, then he secured the rights and began trying to raise the millions of dollars necessary to make this film well. In the meantime, he was writing scripts for notable directors such as Guy Ritchie, Todd Field and Bryan Singer to pay his bills. The daily and weekly developments of this project largely became the family rhythms, the talk and lingo and hopes and dreams and frustrations we shared as one. I was to work on the film and I set my life up accordingly, holding an office job that I could leave with two weeks' notice and building a small savings. None of us had any idea that he would be trying to raise this money for seven years.

Paul began trying to write about his experience of this project, but found that he couldn't because he was too close to it. Then one Saturday in the spring of 2005, I was languidly milling around at the farmer's market in the square by Portland State University while my boyfriend William sold gigantic quantities of gourmet mushrooms at a booth run by a skittish local farmer, when my cell phone rang and it was Paul.

"Hey nutcase!"

"Hey freakazoid!" I greeted him, not missing a beat. "What's going on?"

"Well, I was just talking to Andrew Harvey and telling him that I was having trouble trying to write my experiences about setting up *Something Happened* and he said 'Why doesn't Maria do it?' and I said 'That's a great idea,' so I was wondering if you wanted to write the documentary?"

I stopped short, stunned with the aftershock of a hundred intermingled emotions. The dominant one was that here, dropped before me like manna from heaven, or a bomb, for that matter, was the offer of a writing job. I had had two false starts in writing a book; one was an outline for a self-help book that I wrote a proposal for to try and get some advance cash to continue, and the other a long philosophical essay about the need for absolute spiritual revolution. The only thing I needed to make me totally happy was a big writing project with some promise of marketing potential. All of a sudden, here it was.

"Me?"

"Yeah, you're the perfect person to write it. Nobody knows me as well as you do."

It has been a matter-of-fact occurrence in our lives that Paul and I are so similar in looks and mannerisms that we astonish people we meet by our obvious kinship. I always tell people who comment on this that we overlap by about 80% and have kind of developed our own language, communicating whole sentences with a look, making up words that have shared meaning for us, reading each other's body language and responding to it with an action as if the other had voiced a request.

"You're right, I know you better than anybody. I can talk about me and be talking about you at the same time. I think it would be great," I accepted heartily.

I could feel a fluid energy creeping up my chest and making it flutter with cleansing hope and burgeoning possibility. Somewhere deep inside, somewhere private and protected, the floodgates burst open and the spring where my writing comes from coursed back into my immediate consciousness. Tears began to well up. A kind of delirious relief overtook me, mingled with the foreshadowing of a turmoil of events, a roiling storm on the horizon, swirling and pouring down rain in sweeping spirals, but with the eye in the center always calm and steady. *Anything can happen to me now*, I thought. The feeling was familiar. I sensed in a palpable precognitive wave that I would be exhausted and in danger, financially jeopardized and…wait, fully alive.

"Andrew said it should be called *How Something Happened*. Isn't that a great title?" There was boyish glee in Paul's voice.

Andrew Harvey, world-renowned spiritual scholar and author of over thirty books, was my primary mentor, both spiritually and academically, while I was getting my Ph.D. in transpersonal psychology. At the time, a friend of mine, who was familiar with his work, recommended that I take a class with him. I didn't. Then, one day, as I was completing my closing shift in the school cafeteria, a large class that wouldn't fit in any of the classrooms began to assemble. This man strode into the room, dressed in black with wild black hair and a booming English accent, and, without introduction, proceeded to give the most wildly gesticulating, passionate speech on Rumi and the spiritual path that I had ever heard. I sat on the food counter, transfixed the entire time. I left, filled with a sense of fulfillment of prophecy.

The next week I stayed for the class again. A couple weeks after that, I learned that Andrew had office hours, and guiltily went to him and confessed that I had been sitting in on his

class, unregistered. I told him how it happened by coincidence, and how a friend had recommended his class and I didn't take it and here I was anyway, and how his lectures had affected me, and he looked me straight in the eye and invited me to stay in the class and come see him during his office hours. A couple months later I was invited to his house for a private party in celebration of his new book. While I was writing my own dissertation, Andrew hired me to do some preliminary research, type and edit his book, *The Essential Gay Mystics*.

"Yes, it's perfect," I laughed. "*How Something Happened*! What an amazing thing it is to make something happen!" Andrew was always coming up with bursts of inspiration like that, little gems offered freely and unselfconsciously.

"Very good. We'll be in touch. Bye, nut. I love you."

"I love you too."

After the click, I stood there with the phone in my hand and I knew that something had just happened, something had just changed. One of those closed doors that Joseph Heller talks about creaked dramatically open and the angels, and the demons, behind it saw their first light of day.

Of course, nothing happens as expected, especially in Hollywood. Two months later, in June, my brother wrote a script in a gonzo two-week frenzy called *Life on Mars*. (The name was eventually changed to *One Day Like Rain* due to copyright issues concerning a current British television show by the same title.) In a sense he didn't write it, he says, it wrote itself through him. He couldn't believe what was coming out and how it fit together. Something deep within him clicked, his knowledge, both read and intuited, his readings of Rumi and Andrew Harvey and the Rosicrucian Order all merged into each other in an alembic fire, and words came. They came and came like a geyser. By August he had decided to make the film.

The original date the shoot was supposed to begin was November 21st, 2005. When I broke this to my boss with a month's notice in the office of the classical music store where I worked, I was prepared to leave my job, or, rather, be asked to leave, since it was approaching Christmas season and there was nobody to fill in for me. Rather than fire me, he let me have a seven-week leave of absence.

William and I bought plane tickets three weeks ahead of time, which was as long as we could wait and still get an affordable fare. William is acting in the film as Ian, the elder of the

spontaneously enlightened community of outcasts in the woods, as well as doing some work in the art department and serving as an alchemical consultant to Paul. I am on board as the director's assistant and as the writer of this book about the movie.

As our date of departure drew closer it became clear that we had not raised enough money to shoot the film. The film got postponed until February 2006. I went to my boss and asked for my job back. He was glad to have me for the Christmas season, lucky for me. The guy that was hired to take my place would work part time with me in the office and part time as a sales clerk until I left.

I was finally able to establish February 12 as the new departure date. William and I took our plane tickets off hold and set ourselves up to leave February 12. A couple days later the date got pushed to February 19. Well. What's to be done? It was set. We were going. William needed to be there early for a week of rehearsals anyway. The shoot got pushed again to February 28 right before we left but there was nothing we could do at that point. We got on the plane. From then on, for me, it was surrender.

After a surreal flurry of activity still imprinted by adrenalin on my nerves, I found myself on an airplane passing over the austere, snow-capped Three Sisters. They looked so beautiful and peaceful from my vantage point 30,000 feet in the air. I sat there by the window, silently brooding that what looks so inviting from afar are steep, barren slopes up close, harsh and unforgiving. William was eating sushi beside me, craning his neck over me to see Breitenbush Hot Springs out the window.

"Put your head back just a minute. Is that Detroit Lake? Your on-board geographer is here to tell you where you're at." He talked about taking me to the Alvord Desert, where you think you're in the Serenghetti with pronghorn antelopes running wild. I noticed that one of the flight attendants looked a little like Joan Moynihan from my doctoral program at CIIS, except that if it were Joan, she would be flying the route from San Francisco to Japan and back, her head always in the clouds.

"Do you know Joni Jenkins?" I asked her. "She is a new flight attendant on this Horizon Air run from Portland to Burbank." Yet another flight attendant I know. Joni is the Mother Mary-channeling ex-girlfriend of an eccentric Light Worker friend of ours named David, who was renovating his house to sell and raise money for the healing center he is opening in Portland

this spring. David is a wiry dynamo in his young forties, committed to running his new spiritual enterprise while catching women and Judas Priest concerts on the side.

"I've been working part time for a long time, I don't know many of the new people," the flight attendant smiled. She hands me cranberry juice, a cinnamon, loaf-shaped muffin, and a packet of dark chocolate covered coffee beans. William and I make big eyes at each other over the coffee beans. Neither of us drinks coffee except on giggling rare occasions when we decide to do a drug together, making tooting noises like trains and bouncing out of our seats.

"I was on this flight from Chicago to L.A. with this young soccer team from Bolivia," William began, in story-mode, "and this kid had a big bag of chocolate espresso beans and they kept passing it around amongst themselves. They were all very polite but after twenty minutes the noise level was through the roof as they bounced up and down in their seats. Finally, the flight attendant came and confiscated the bag and said, 'You'll get this back after we land.'"

I stared at him, dumbfounded. He went on about one of the kids offering him the bag and he ate a few beans and was totally wired. I smiled, and started to eat my muffin while he talked. It was good, really good for plane food. The cranberry juice was good too. These tastes became linked to my mounting sense of freedom, little packaged foods eaten high above the earth amidst the airplane roar and buzz of voices, packages exclusively for enchanted high altitude trips.

Grinning, William opens his little bag of chocolate coffee beans and hands me one. We eat one together as if we're doing a weird drug, all hunkered towards each other and each of us watching the trajectory the bean makes to the other's mouth with rapt interest. We chew and snicker, sharing a little secret. The flight attendant fills my glass again. *It's all a gift, truly a gift,* I think to myself. I feel lavished and rich when food is offered to me anytime, I'm not sure why. I didn't grow up poor without enough to eat or anything like that. It has something to do with a deep sense of another acknowledging my existence and caring for it enough to want it to continue. It is a personal and intimate moment when someone offers me food, it feels deep and nourishing and affirming, and even if I shake my head and say no thank you and the extended hand is drawn back with the morsel in it, I am aware that I live in a situation where I actually have the experience of 'no thank you, I'm full' and that many do not and I am grateful. A burgeoning sense of possibility begins creeping through me as I sit there in my quiet internal little plane experience.

"You know, the first flight on a 757 back in '94 that I was ever on had maybe 25 people on it, and I was running back and forth from one side of the plane to the other looking at everything out the windows, so the stewardess told the pilot that she saw me doing this and he got special clearance from ground control and flew totally around Crater Lake, just for me. I couldn't believe what a gift that was. I thanked them profusely and said, that's certainly worth the price of admission." William smiled, remembering not only that instance, but nostalgic for a bygone time when flying was much more casual, a time when embarking on a flight was about extraordinary sights and magic rather than terrorism and suspicion. He grabbed my hand and kissed the thin platinum band that he put there this past Christmas rapidly several times. We had been waiting for this day for seven years, really, we were just making *Life on Mars* instead of *Something Happened.*

While giggling and cuddling in our own little world we eventually noticed that we were approaching Burbank. The sun looked so bright on all the rows of houses down there, so warm and inviting, *and soon I'll get off this plane*, I thought, *with my one suitcase and laptop computer and Marantz PMD 660 audio recorder, and be part of making a movie*. I saw rows of palm trees, thin sticks with little tufts on top lining the highway. Palm trees! All the associations I have with them here in L.A. from when I used to live two miles from Paul came back. Boogie-boarding country, here I come again!

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is our pleasure to welcome you to downtown Burbank..." the always-a-little-too-loud voice of the flight attendant blared over the intercom, and before I knew it we were on the ground and I was exiting the plane, filing outside and down the ramp stairs in a burst of light and warmth. *My God, the smell of California sunshine!* My whole world right now is about that smell and I feel reborn, actually reborn, tired though I am, I feel deeply fed by sunshine and a warm catlike basking flooding me, making everything new and alive and worthwhile. It is more a smell, oddly enough, than the sensation of warmth that is overpowering. It is the seasoned smell of things that have sat long in the sun, mixed with smog and tarmac, which I welcome with joy, the smell of metal and rubber and blue sky all infused together so that the man-made objects have become part sun, and I laugh joyfully and feel light in the chest.

Out at the curb William and I stand with our baggage, waiting for Paul to swoop in like a valiant knight in a red chariot and take us away. The woman in front of me at the curb is Asian, about 60 years old, with a ten carat emerald on one hand and a four carat diamond on the other, a

black Armani coat draped over her arm, high heels, all in black on this beautiful sunny day. Diamonds in white gold or platinum drip from her wrists and neck. A young woman in a silver Lexus pulls up, maybe her daughter, and picks her up. Not once did she smile.

We suddenly see Paul's bright red Honda pull around the corner and there he is behind the wheel, in a burnt orange t-shirt and silver Armani shades, all smiles and welcomes. I throw my arms around him and press my cheek against his, bouncing and uttering childlike little 'oh yes oh yes yay yay yays' in each other's faces. He opens the trunk of his car. I am suddenly riveted with a mischievous air and Paul knows exactly what I'm going to do.

"Raaaaaaaaah! Raaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" I yell, and begin to rip off all my layers of clothes one by one, roaring into the sunshine, waterproof rain jacket, fleece liner, sweatshirt, "Raaaah! Rahh! Raaah!" We pile in with all our gear and start power-talking about David Lynch, *Life on Mars*, Mickey Mouse and Klaus Kinski. The first thing we do is hook up with Steve and Victor at Cafe Verona near Paul's apartment.

I cannot see Steve and Victor without going completely crazy with love. Steve is tall and wiry with dark brown, wavy, longish hair and bright blue spiritual eyes like Paul's, in fact, he looks a little like a taller version of Paul. I met Steve when I lived in L.A. back in 1999. Paul and I were going to meet him at Venice Beach so Paul could introduce me. We had parked and were approaching the beach. People were crisscrossing back and forth. "There he is!" said Paul, excitedly. I had the feeling of being a film camera panning smoothly with people walking back and forth in the foreground and then my focus was a figure sitting on a large overturned white pail with two drumsticks using the bottom rim of the pail as a drum.

"Steve!" Paul shouted. The figure turned. We approached it. He stood up in slow motion. "This is my sister Maria."

Our eyes locked as we stood face to face. Neither of us said anything. There was a pause. I looked at the being before me with slightly befuddled wonder. That quickly changed into a feeling of impossible recognition.

"I feel like you're my brother," I breathed.

That was the first thing I ever said to him. The recognition was mutual. The three of us walked barefoot on the beach together in a slight chill, Steve and I at first getting over the shock of our meeting and then beginning to share the details of our lives, which we didn't know despite the fact that we have been brother and sister forever and ever in all lifetimes past. Steve did not

know Victor back then. They met a couple years later at the Self-Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine, a picturesque spiritual temple and ashram devoted to the teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda, in a fated moment of soul mate recognition. They have both overcome obstacles in their lives and have the wisdom that arises from transcending the pretense of trying to set up life so that it's perfect. Once you reach that state you realize life isn't perfect, it's magic if you allow it to be.

At Cafe Verona I ran up to Steve and Victor waiting outside the door and threw my arms around Steve first, clawing his back to hold him closer and pressing my face against his, emitting ecstatic yays, looking him in the eyes, then grabbing him close again, bouncing together and he picking me up and twirling me around. Then I ran to Victor and clawed his back and looked in his eyes and grabbed him close again. Then I grabbed them both with one arm each. William knew them both and liked them as well. None of us cared who saw us, we were too happy.

Over lunch we talked about how Victor's uncle in New Mexico has a horse breeding business where they bring in a mare to this isolated stud and instantly the stud's penis emerges erect. "There's something amazing about that," Paul mused, "something totally pure, it doesn't care which mare, it's just instant."

Steve and Victor have bought ten acres of land from Victor's uncle and eventually want to build a house on their new property. They are planning to get married in a small ceremony in town with a reception on their property for all their family and friends.

The food comes and it's amazing. Paul has beef carpaccio, a bed of spinach with thin slices of parmesan and beef. William has a bowl of rice meal, which is something like oatmeal but is much more creamy and delicious, with brown raisins, golden raisins and whipped cream with cinnamon on top. I sip an Orangina and listen attentively to Steve and Victor's plans.

We are sitting on an enclosed patio with European wrought iron gates that fold open and ferns spreading a leafy garden look. A tiered, stone fountain with flowers coming out of it provides an auditory backdrop of flowing water. Paul's meal is served on a square white dish with gold trim. The white columns between the folding gates have a sort of twining ivy around them, the table tops are dark marble. They serve little dishes of olive oil and balsamic vinegar and little baskets of fresh hot bread before the meal.

William tells Paul about Harold, a deeply brooding borderline neo-Nazi artist we know who creates these bold-lined, Satanic drawings that have been used in comic books, and his goth

girlfriend who wanted to make love to him in the cemetery where her grandmother was buried in the dress she committed suicide in. Completely enraptured, Harold moved to Prague to be with Andrea and she started physically abusing him. He would write William these e-mails telling him that he's bleeding again and that he can't be with Andrea any more and that he's coming back to the states, then he decides to stay and is beat up again and wants to come home but doesn't have the money. "He had this period where he was giving this sort of Neo-Nazi kind of rap, but he's really a very polite and very gentle person."

After lunch and a greatly prolonged goodbye for the amount of time we're going to be apart, we go back to Paul's place, where William will be staying while Paul and I head off to Laguna Niguel. I am going to spend a week with my parents in their vacation rental house before I begin working on the film. William will be working on artwork for the set at Paul's place, awaiting Paul who would be back in L.A. the next day.

"The thing is that we're always children," Paul explains animatedly, whizzing down a six lane highway. "This adult thing is just an act we put on. I mean, there's an evolution, but fun isn't reserved for children alone." Paul sticks his fist in the air and shouts "yeah!" with unbridled enthusiasm, his eyes crinkling and lips curling in an impish grin. "Being an adult is an act. Everyone I know is like they always were. People put on acts because they believe that what they really feel isn't socially acceptable."

When we pull into the garage, the door opens and Mom and Dad are standing there all smiles and warm hugs, almost tears of joy in their eyes. I hug them both at once. My mom is a petite and elegant woman in her early seventies, well-blended highlighted hair swept sideways on her forehead, intriguing green eyes and always a tan look about her skin no matter what the season. My dad is in his mid seventies, also modest in height with a warm wide smile, stocky build and hair that has not yet turned all white garlanding his temples. They are both full blooded Italians, my mom is originally from the town of St. Andrea in Calabria and my dad was born in Brooklyn to Neapolitan parents. Both of them have all the emotional passion and family centeredness that Italians are all about.

Almost immediately we open our Christmas presents. It is February 12 but there are unopened Christmas presents under a still lit tiny tabletop tree that Paul carts back and forth from his apartment when my parents rent a place in Laguna Niguel for two winter months every year. Because of the chaos surrounding the scheduling of the movie shoot, I did not make it to

Southern California for Christmas this year and they waited to open most of the presents until I arrived. It was a tearful process, me not being there for Christmas, with a couple instances of me assuring my parents that our family was not falling apart and them pleading that we have never been apart for Christmas in thirty nine years and that this was an unpardonable tragedy. We got through that and were making up for it by opening our presents all together. Among my Christmas presents are a 1 GB flash card for my Marantz recorder and a reader device that can be used to transfer audio files from the recorder to the computer. Paul is going to buy me a ticket to Disneyland after the shoot.

After opening our presents we had a dinner of spinach pie, spinach dip, shrimp and marinated artichoke hearts, a typical Christmas Eve hors d'oeuvres feast in my family. Then Paul and I went for a walk in the full moonlight. The full moon was the next day. We stopped outside the house in the cul-de-sac and stared at the moon together. It was an unusually warm night. Paul said to me, "This is insane, that it's this warm and it's a full moon and we're here together."

We start walking and pass the pool and hot tub area where the pool scenes in *Life on Mars* will be shot. Paul says this pool isn't heated, but last year it was. Paul told Marina, the actress playing Jennifer in *Life on Mars*, that he would jump in too because he wouldn't ask his actors to do anything he wouldn't. We also saw the hillside drop off where Trevor and Samantha, who play Stefan and Gina, are overlooking the city and talking about mystery and other worlds. Paul said they would do a shot over the city and then pan to a gas line off slightly to the left to juxtapose the beautiful view with urban grunginess. We were amazed at the light coming from the full moon. We started walking down a steeply sloping hill with dried weeds and shrubs dotting the landscape here and there. We slid down and explored around, talking about how pretty the area is in a way and also how bleak. Nobody is ever around, and all the houses are laid out in an unvarying and oppressively manicured fashion, yet there is a definite sense of wealth in the tidiness and a beauty in the panoramic view of the hillsides and ocean.

We scrambled back up the hill and my shoes slipped and I put my hand in a prickly plant and had to tweeze the little needles out with my fingernails. As we walked down the road, enjoying each other's company and chattering constantly, we suddenly came upon a sign that read "Private Property, No Trespassing." We looked at each other with the dawning realization that this sign was referring to the territory where we just traipsed around. I said that I had to

write this down because it would be cool for someone to read about it years later, it would have an evocative tone of adventure when right now it is just our lives.

As we continued to walk around the neighborhood streets, Paul was telling me about a successful television actor who has been trying to make a short film for over ten years. Paul said, "You just take your own money and make your short the way you want to. With his show's re-runs I'm sure he makes so much money."

Paul also was recently inspired by his long-time friend, Keith Arnold, and another friend who proposed that *Life on Mars* might even turn out to be a better movie than *Something Happened.* It certainly is a truly unique script on the order of David Lynch's *Eraserhead*. There is nothing out there like it and I feel that it is a truly creative interpretation of the evolution of human consciousness. Paul explained that one point about having something unique be really successful in film is that "you get typed. Like David Lynch. He does weird. But if you're totally an artist, you don't care. You just do whatever you're called to do next regardless of what people say."

When we got back inside my mom took me aside and asked, "Are you going to take charge of this house? This is very expensive Stickley furniture," she indicated the furniture in the living room. I told her that the people I know on the film are very respectful and that Paul would be directing things, explaining how things are to be.

Then we sat around in a circle while Paul shared pictures of his prospective new apartment complex, the Mariner's Village in Marina del Rey. One bedroom apartments are $1,535 and up, and you get a theater, heated pools and hot tubs, a gym, an on-site marketplace with a deli, a hairdressing salon, ocean access, tennis courts and a huge lounge area with a fireplace big enough to walk in like they sometimes show in movies with palaces. Trevor, Paul's friend who is playing Stefan in *Life on Mars,* lives there, and when Paul saw his place he immediately fell in love with it. "I've lived in the same apartment for fourteen years and never wanted to move and when I saw this place it was instant, just like that, I knew I was moving here."

When Keith saw it he joked, "So, this is the plan. You move in here and I will live in the lounge. I will have my backpack and laptop and will sit in here and nobody uses it anyway so they will think I am a resident hanging out, and I will sleep during the day at times and use the

facilities and rotate the times I'm in here and buy cheap ramen in the little grocery store and live on that and go swimming and visit you, all for free!"

Paul, Steve, Victor and Keith have been talking about going to India with Andrew Harvey on one of the tours to spiritual sites that he leads and filming the whole trip. Keith is one of the producer/investors on *Life on Mars*, and is also doing some photography work, his specialty, for the film. Steve is the editor of *Life on Mars* as well as *Something Happened*. He works professionally in television as an editor, being nominated for an Emmy for his work on *Arrested Development*. He also worked on the TV shows *Clueless*, *The Tick* and *Andy Richter Controls the Universe*. In fact, that was how Paul and Steve met, in a roundabout, trick-of-fate way.

Back then Paul was doing stand-in work and was cast as an extra on *Clueless*. Steve told me that one of the producers on the set yelled to him in a thick New York accent when Paul walked in, "Hey Steeeve! Look! There's yar brotha!" Steve looked over with a glance of acknowledgement, and then forgot the incident. Months later, Paul was shopping at Trader Joe's and heard a voice behind him, "Say, aren't you an actor?"

Paul turned and stared into a set of bright blue eyes. "No, I'm not," he replied, since he doesn't consider himself an actor at all; he was just picking up freelance work while he secured his next directing job.

"But weren't you in *Clueless*?" persisted the blue eyes. The eyes now had Paul's full attention. "Well...yes. How do you know that?"

"I edited the show. I've seen you in the dailies. I never forget a face. Steve Sprung," he smiled and stuck out his hand. They rapidly became friends, each sharing the deep spirituality at their core.

When I was telling Paul that I believed the story of his life was distinctly an American story, one of freedom and spirituality and keeping his integrity, he pointed to his heart and said, "The American Spirit is here, not in the culture around me." I smiled and thought, *everything is there, Paul, everything is there.*

Chapter 2

Rules, Regulations and Reality

The next day I awoke in a blur of non-recognition to a bright, sunny room. Today my family and I are going to a spot on the beach where my dad found veins of turquoise and lapis. I scarcely believed him, although I knew he was telling the truth, because the idea of veins of natural semi-precious stone that I could chip out and take home was almost too rich with childlike treasure-finding joy to bear.

"So, we're going to go find some turquoise today, aren't we?" I ask my dad again, just to make absolutely sure it wasn't a dream or a joke or a misconception.

"Yes, we sure are, honey," my dad assures me.

"I get to dig my own power object out of the earth? I've never done that, that's just amazing. It feels different than just buying it in a store."

William and I have been trying to get to Arkansas for years to dig our own quartz crystals, and now my dad is telling me that he stumbled upon veins of turquoise and lapis while taking a walk on the beach. He's also now talking about what seems to be a long process of making eggs for breakfast, Paul says he's going to take a shower, I hear laundry in the dryer, and I realize I'm being called upon to pretend to be in my thirties as my body shows that I am, nobody can tell that I'm actually eight, so they're not responding accordingly. I think in cheerful silent agitation about the turquoise glinting oxidized blue in the sun and about bringing out a little hammer and taking a little piece of magic with me.

My dad comes in off the patio and says he just saw a coyote. They prowl around here looking for rabbits in the bushes. We saw two last night.

So we're finally all showered and sit down to a breakfast of scrambled eggs and toast. Paul is talking about Brooke Shields and how she met with him about being Bob Slocum's wife

in *Something Happened* and gave him a CD of her performing in Cabaret and told him, "You're the only one in the world besides my sister that has this CD." Paul says she's an amazing person but she was talking about her sister still having problems as well as her mother, who was a "backstage mom" and groomed her, or, rather, exploited her from an early age to be a Hollywood kid actor.

After breakfast, Paul had to run to Diedrich Coffee to check his e-mail and to the post office to send an investment packet to Loni Peristere, whom he's known since their USC days together. Loni has gone on to be the visual effects supervisor on the film *Serenity* and on the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, and *Firefly*. Loni is doing the effects for *Life on Mars* as well. He is a kind, supportive person and Paul speaks fondly of him, "He's such an ally. He says now we're all the perfect age to be doing this, doing our own work. In your twenties you're too young and don't have the skills or the resources, and now he sees I'm one of the first ones in our group jumping forward and he wants to support that. He's doing my effects and he's Joss Whedon's special effects guy. He didn't know we didn't have the money to finish shooting and he's passing the investment packet around to all his business partners."

We finally pile into the car and embark on the journey to the treasure-finding site. We bring along a hammer and screwdriver to serve as rock hounding tools, because that is all we could find in the garage of the rental house. On the way, Paul gets a call from Ben Tappan, his manager, who launches into something about his lawyer wanting more than just his 5% of Paul's profits for *Something Happened*. Paul pulls out his iBook in the car and starts looking something up. Apparently Rena Ronson, who is with an independent film division of William Morris that represents Paul, wanted to know what was going on.

All this time I'm still eight, but I'm now an eight year old aware of the adult world of responsibility and business and important-seeming animated phone conversations. We finally reached our mysterious treasure destination and walked down some concrete stairs on a small private beach off Fisherman's Cove in Laguna Beach. My dad led me to a cliff wall with the bottom part of it a blue-gray. I caught up with him, my sneakered feet sinking a little in the sand, the crash, almost crinkle-hiss of waves methodically whooshing in the background, and stared at the wall. We had just passed a sign that said, "Absolutely no sample collecting--$1000 fine," and threw the hammer back in the car and stashed the screwdriver in my purse, just in case we could pry a little piece loose, quietly, reverently and unnoticed.

My dad is standing there and I catch up with him and he says, "Let me see that," and takes the screwdriver from me with an air of authority and purpose. He starts chipping away at the cliff wall, which has no jutting protrusions at all and looks pretty formidable. I say, "No, no!" as he chips at a lump in the sandstone-like boulders by the cliff wall. Nothing happens. I see my dad wiggling a little piece of quartz with his fingers and I grab the screwdriver back and chip at it and it comes off! "Look, look! I got a piece!" It is a small 3/4 inch by 3/4 inch squarish piece of whitish greenish grayish quartz. Delighted, I put it in my pocket. All this time we are looking furtively around at the family down the beach to see if they are calling the police on us. It doesn't look like it as the adults go about gabbing in the sun and the kids run back and forth, absorbedly digging in the sand. My dad and I stare at the turquoise wall and I stand on the solid-looking lump of low-grade lapis in the sand, being washed over periodically by waves, and realize there's no way to procure a piece of either with any abracadabra or waving the screwdriver in the air or wielding it with all my might. My mom was saying, with a restrained, frantic urgency, "Tod! What are you doing? You're going to get fined! Do you want to pay $1000?"

Threatening a fine like that, for what, I ask myself, when you look at the reality of the situation. There are no crystal shop owners trying to capitalize on their furtive finds, if they could recognize these stones in the rough to begin with, or vandals with pickaxes and evil destructive glints in their eyes, just an old man and his grown daughter, sharing a moment of bonding on an honestly joyful afternoon, unransacked by the corrosion of age, disappointment and deflation of spirit caused by the ongoing acclimation of a thousand tiny injustices. Just a pure little moment, a tiny slice of life with its own living pulse against all odds in a world where it is very difficult to be anything pure at all.

"People think a movie is more selfish," Paul explains, "you make *your* movie of *your* vision, but I see it as such a gift and then I get it out there to share with the world."

"Yeah, to me, in our family, we don't have weddings and houses and kids, we have graduations and movies and books. This is like a wedding. What am I going to do, just let it go by? It's a family momentous event," I beamed back at him.

"Sure, people think the film industry is where you get rich and it's all a myth. At least for me, it'll never happen. It doesn't make sense given the kind of movies I make and want to

make. I mean, I'll be comfortable, and about that other stuff, I don't care. But, of course, I'm involved in the business stuff just to get a movie made."

"Of course, but only to the extent of raising money to make it possible and to create a contract professional enough so that people feel comfortable giving you money."

"Yes, but it would have been better just to be able to put all the money in myself," Paul said, with earnest.

"But without the struggle of raising it, wouldn't you feel less identified with it and committed to it?"

He took a moment to ponder this. "Yeah, I guess you're right."

We stop and look in a shop window for Dan Miller jewelry off Broadway and admire a huge selenite specimen. This row of shops is in the general vicinity of the treasure-finding beach, and we are all strolling leisurely down the street, window-shopping.

"William would love to see that," I said, staring at it with appreciation.

Our next stop is Taco Laguna for little Mexican snacks and to catch up with news about friends of the family. Lauren Palazzoli (now Radford) and Jeff Pauline's wife, Gina, are having baby showers on the same day, March 1, says my mother. Steve Wentworth, a long time friend of Paul's, has had intestinal ailments for some time and is feeling a little better.

Paul returns to the pre-production challenges of *Life on Mars,* informing me that Steve Sprung, Dylan Kussman, Jesse Eisenberg and Trevor Zacharias are SAG (Screen Actor's Guild) and that SAG is telling him that they can't work on *Life on Mars* without being paid the standard minimum $100 per day wage. They are his friends and are being told they can't be in their friend's low budget movie for free even though they want to be! So to get around it, Paul is paying them and they are paying Paul back the money, plus Jesse is even reimbursing the SAG fee. Without this arrangement, if SAG found out, they could shut the film down.

"What?" I exclaimed, in horrified disbelief, "Your friends can't just participate in a venture that is all about people sharing a vision and pitching in and making it collectively happen?"

"Oh no," Paul said, with grave sincerity, "You can't just make a movie."

As we continued to wander down the streets of Laguna Beach, we went into Fiori on South Coast Parkway off Ocean Avenue, an upscale shop that sells Italian Majolica pottery and dishware similar to a shop I used to work at in Los Angeles called Cottura.

"This stuff is really beautiful," I told the elegant saleswoman in her mid fifties. "I recognize a lot of these patterns, there's Raffallesco, one of my favorites," I said turning over a vase to see the familiar Deruta inscription. "I used to work at Cottura, which is a lot like this place."

The saleswoman looked at me directly. "Yes, they had beautiful things and the people were so nice. It's too bad they went bankrupt."

"What?" I said with a start. "What do you mean? When?"

"A few years ago. Between the management of their three stores, shipping and import tax, which went up every year as security measures increased, they couldn't afford to stay in business. It got to the point where relatives of theirs were putting in money but they couldn't make it."

I hesitated with uneasiness then thanked her, looked around a little more and left, feeling a little disturbed. The owners were a gay male couple who were reasonable employers, providing fair wages and medical insurance and a 401K plan to everybody, and who would serve us spiked eggnog and refreshments during the last couple days before Christmas while we were working, "to help deal with the demanding customers" there in the Century City area. And, after all, they were peddling art. There are a lot less wholesome and honest ways of making a living than that.

Back in the car Paul gets a call from Doug Shannon, the Director of Photography on *Life on Mars*. He was also the DP on Paul's first film, *Freak Talks About Sex*, eight years earlier. "It's important that we get through all the Laguna shots," Paul was saying, "It's considered a residential street so we don't need a permit...All right, my friend, see you tonight."

Doug is flying in from New York City tonight. He is bringing with him all manner of equipment, filters for the camera and whatnot, to save Paul money. Paul then calls Robert, the current president of the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films, to ask about costumes for the alien scenes. This organization was founded by the late Dr. Reed, former professor at USC, who was quite an eccentric character, an animated-talking Dracula buff who was considered the foremost authority on Dracula in the United States, lived on candy and ham even though he was diabetic (that was what he died of, in his fifties too) and thought Hitler, though wicked and evil, was a great man, and that Bryan Singer, the famous director, friend and colleague of Paul dating back to his USC days, was a great man as well. Robert may have

connections for the fishlike alien creature suits needed for the film. "We have to create costumes and I was wondering if you have connections to Stan Winston and those guys." Paul writes in his day runner the name Paul Salamof and notes his phone number.

When we got back to the house Paul asked me if I wanted to go to the hot tub and I said, "sure." While enjoying the soak, we reminisced about some interesting times we had together.

"Remember that time when we were all at Magic Mountain and Nicole and I were discussing the idea of having an orgy and she points to one of the guys in our group and makes a disgusted face," I prodded him, referring to a bunch of his classmates from USC and me.

"That's so mean," Paul smiled wanly.

"I know. I wouldn't have cared. We were all a group and it would have been a shared experience, that's the point."

"She wasn't really open to the full experience of an orgy. She wanted it because there were three guys there that she was attracted to; Stas, Tom and me," Paul said, matter-of-factly.

"Yeah, I remember that, but you never did anything with her or let her get out of control."

"But there was the time she jumped on me and stuck her tongue down my throat."

I snickered. "But you pushed her away, right? You didn't respond."

"No, because she was going out with my roommate and he was in the next room. I wasn't ever attracted to her anyway."

"Something like that happened to me once," I mused. "I was visiting Kristin and John in their apartment in New Jersey before they were married, and Bob, my suitemate my senior year of college was there and his girlfriend Kara, who was also my friend, had gone to bed and Bob said to me, 'We can be together tonight and nobody has to know.'"

"That's not very romantic."

"No, and it was really disrespectful because Kara was my friend."

We were out of the hot tub by now and sitting in the sun on the back patio. The temperature was in the 80's, unusual for February even in Southern California, and we talked again about how there was something divorced from nature about our surroundings, luxurious though they were.

"Mom and Dad can do a lot of little things in their lives if they wanted to. They're retired and have a little savings and a lot of little things add up to a happy life," I mused.

"I wish they were happier sometimes. Being happy is really about the people you're with and your creative engagement, doing creative work you're passionate about."

I smiled at Paul. Sometimes we share one mind. Paul started to tell me that Bryan Singer has bought a seat on the first lay people's space shuttle that plans to launch soon. "It's, I think, $200,000 and you actually go out into space. There are chambers that you float in and can look in all directions, and you don't have to wear a suit. It's totally commercial, it's about how they can make this experience attractive to people."

"It's attractive to me," I stared at him in gaping wonder. "I'd love to do it. I've wanted to be an astronaut ever since I was a kid."

"I'm sure it'll get cheaper. It's just the first time."

"I hope so. I'd go out of my way to have that experience." I think about how I've gone out of my way to have *this* experience, how I've left my way-too-long workaday week life to be part of something meaningful and creative and through which I can communicate something of myself. God! I remember that Henry Miller was always struggling to write with no money and how he worked for three years at the Asswipe Telegraph Company and when he finally left he talked about what a stupid experience it was, a black hole of time in which nothing meaningful or empowering happened, it just swallowed up his days and his life and left him no better off for it. That can't be life. My spirit just denies it. This beach chair in the back yard, these thick-leafed shrubs, this sunshine scent of plastic and concrete, of window glass and orange trees and whiffs of chlorine in my skin from the pool, ahhh, that is life. My skin has a crinkly feel from being sun baked and chemically dry and I put lotion over the dryness and still feel it, my nose feels a touch wrinkly and skin-taut, my hair hanging in my face, already bleached a micro-shade lighter, maybe not really, but it feels that way, post-beach and sunshine-scented and freely sensual, bare feet, white t-shirt, watch strap line on my wrist, feeling I have everything I need, all my energy reserves deposited in the bank, available at my fingertips, feeling robust and full. Ahhh. Breathe, look, sit, eyes close in a squinty, satisfied way like a cat in a pool of sun. *The sun shines equally on everyone and everything. That is God's truth, the most fundamental kind. And I am included in it.* My heart beats with a contentment that is absolute. My spirit feels joy. My spirit feels joy.

From the fringes of my awareness, my mom's voice drifts out to me on the patio. "Hello? Hello? Oh, hi dear! Yes, it's cooking. Yes. Looking forward to it. Bye bye."

Diane Nesley was on the other end of the line, the woman who made this all happen. She is the real estate broker who rented this house to my parents and who supported Paul's decision to use this same house for the "California upscale suburban neighborhood" scenes in *Life on Mars*.

Diane is in her early fifties, somewhat heavyset in a solid-framed Germanic way, with a quick capacity to pay attention to a person's humanity and an open response to creativity, passion and wonder. She is on her way over for dinner.

"Wow. You look like your brother," Diane declared, a little startled, jumping back from me as I approached her with a smile and open arms. I hug her and she stared at me with direct eyes. The conversation is easy and honest, ranging from Rumi to *Life on Mars* to the California art she collects. She loves whatever is put in front of her, all the food and drink and the 70 proof special Kahlua she has never tried. Her eyes light up when you talk about something that moves you. She asks, "How are you?" and means it. She wants to know how you are doing right now and looks directly into your eyes as if she's saying, "I'll hear you." She used to work as a personnel director for the government. She quit because she didn't like who she was becoming. She has developed a knack for creating options in situations where there appear to be none.

"Do you have a 'plan B' for the pool?" Diane asks Paul. Paul plans to use one of the complex's pools for the pool scenes if Diane can get him permission for this.

"Well, we have another option but it's two hours from here so it's not the best 'plan B.'"

I wonder if he is referring to Bryan Singer's pool, which he can use as a last resort.

"What?" I chime in, kind of out of the loop. "Is this for the heated pool?"

"No, the cold pool."

"I thought the pool was a secure thing."

"No, the woman in charge of it is a little Gestapo," Diane confides. "She's a stickler about following the rules. She says it would be infringing upon the other homeowners to film there, but I'm a homeowner and anyone is allowed to lease it for a nominal fee, so I figure I can lease it and you are my guests."

Well, what an ally. She gets it, doesn't she? She sees the passion in Paul, passion without malice, a pure surrender to what he has to do, what he is called to do. She sees it and sees its value and it speaks for itself.

Later in the night Paul openly asks Diane, “Would you be open to acting a small role in the film or do you not have any interest in that at all?”

Diane briefly considers the offer and replies, “Sure, I think it would be fun,” in her way of considering everything that comes to her as if it is just the normal flow of things.

So Paul has her read for the part of Jennifer’s mom, who has two lines, and through Diane the role is magically transformed in the script from a Mary Kay saleswoman to a real estate agent. He has me stand in for Jennifer and we go through the scene six or eight times.

“Very good. You did fine. You’ve got the part.”

“You’re going to be a staaaaaar,” my dad bursts out with a big grin and a caricaturish open-armed gesture of taa-daaa.

Diane level-headedly replies, “It’s just for fun.”

Chapter 3

Foundations and Rooftops

Doug Shannon, the Director of Photography, was lucky to make it into town last night. He flew in on Jet Blue and got in late, narrowly escaping being snowed in at JFK airport in New York City, but now he is sleeping on Paul's floor, surrounded by his own luggage and equipment. Like me, he has a new home for nearly two months, a free vagabond-type feeling with busy, creative days stretching ahead. No matter what happens, that feeling is always there, something has been made right in my soul.

After grabbing a pair of huge shorts with many pockets at Old Navy for the film set, my parents and I are back at the beach. The weather has turned and it is cool and windy, but the ocean is aventurine green by the shore, shading into lapis farther out, and gives off the same crackle-whoosh-hiss sound, like a rain stick being tipped over endlessly with tiny beads trickling down inside. There are spiky aloe-like cacti and little purple flowers on tufts sticking out of green, leafy bases in front of us on the bench where we sit. Black basalt-looking rocks are partially submerged in the ocean a couple hundred feet out into the water, a wave crashing over them now and then. A commercial crew has just finished filming their advertisement and are packing up their equipment. A clothes rack with different colors of women's leather jackets is set up on the sandy perimeter of the path. A palm tree towers above us, and stairs and a ramp can be seen winding down to the beach below. It is Tuesday, and I'm by the beach with a notebook in my hand, a smile on my face and gratitude in my heart.

Paul has gone back to L.A. to work on the shot lists and other pre-production arrangements with Doug. Later that night, I am at the reception desk of an upscale restaurant with my parents for a nice Valentine's Day dinner. I miss William, who is still at Paul's apartment working on artwork for the set. Traditional holidays don't normally hold a lot of

weight for William and I, but I am aware that we are apart and that I would like to honor him and feel his sweetness.

The waitress at Savoie's Fare scanned the guest list and could not find my father's reservation. "Did you call this afternoon?" she asked.

"Yes, three for Tod."

"Oh, here it is. They have you down as 'Pod.'"

We were shown to our table, laughing a little about the Pod thing, weaving our way through a long, thin area in which tables with white tablecloths were rather closely packed. Pink, red and heart-shaped helium balloons with ribbon trails bounced on the ceiling. There was a pink sheet of paper and a cloth napkin on every plate. I started reading the sheet of paper:

Valentine's Day

(Savoie's Fare Style)

February 14, 2006

<u>First</u>

Coconut Shrimp with Tropical Fruit Salsa and Sweet Chili Sauce

and

Stuffed Dates with Gorgonzola and Blue Cheese and Wrapped in Bacon

<u>Second</u>

His and Hers Veloute of Red and Yellow Bell Pepper

<u>Third</u>

Warm Goat Cheese Salad

with Carmelized Nuts and a Hazelnut Vinaigrette

or

Endive Salad

with Blue Cheese, Caramelized Macadamia Nuts and a French Dressing

<u>Fourth</u>

Pineapple-Ginger-Green Tea Granite

Fifth

Chilean Seabass with Beurre Blanc Sauce and served with Shitake Mushroom Risotto and Ratatouille--$75.00

Ossoboucco with Garlic Mashed Potatoes and Button Mushrooms--$75.00

Petite Filet Mignon and Lobster Tail

and Whiskey Pepper Corn Sauce, Potato Gratin and Accompanied with Seasonal Vegetables--$80.00

Sixth

Hearts of Passion or Coeur D'Amour

I stared at this for a long moment then turned the sheet over.

"Is this the menu? Is there more?"

I had seen the menu. It was a white sheet of paper folded into three that my dad had picked up a day or so ago which had five or six vegetarian choices. I have been a vegetarian for sixteen years, since June of 1989, and am always careful to make sure there is something I can eat wherever I go with friends or family. It took a minute to process that this was a single, six course meal, the only thing being served tonight.

"There's nothing on this menu that I can eat," I hissed across the table in a hushed voice.

The waitress, an elegant young woman with oil-treated, cared-for hair pulled back in a pony tail, smart white shirt, black slacks and a large silver "floating heart" pendant on a chain around her neck came over and could tell that something was wrong. I explained to her that I am a vegetarian. It turned out that the Chinese woman who was taking the reservations was hard to understand, and when she asked my dad (Pod, that is) if he wanted to hear the menu, he replied, "No thanks, I have one." So it never came out that there was a special, six course Valentine's Day dinner with a lot of meat and fish in it. I thought, *in a place like this, I'm going to ask for a good dinner and get it, no mixed green salad and cheese plate or anything like that, which is what I usually end up with in circumstances like these.* The waitress was very accommodating and served me all the vegetarian courses plus a delicious portobello mushroom ravioli entree with light cream sauce. A woman sitting at the table across from me who had glitter smeared all

over her chest and looked a little like a younger version of our family's friend, Aunt Ginny, kept talking about inane things that acquaintances of hers did in a progressively louder voice as she got more and more drunk. Our bill turned out to be $247.60.

"Let Pod pick up the tab," my Dad joked.

It was a very delicious, very expensive meal, with as many heart-shaped things as possible in it, such as the ice cream and cake desserts, and the yellow and red pepper soup poured side by side, two-tone in the bowl. It was totally unnecessary for my dad to spend so much money on one dinner but of course I appreciated that he did it, and gave him a big hug and kiss. At the same time, I missed William and our simple way of having all we need between us sitting in the front seats of my car in Mosier, Oregon, coming back from the scenic Gorge with a feast of olives, cheese, chips and bean dip on our laps because it is still too cold to sit outside.

William is now rehearsing with Samantha at Paul's place. I had called him, wanting to hear about his meeting at 2 pm with someone at Erewhon, an L.A. whole foods store we love ("nowhere" spelled backwards, sort of), who was interested in marketing his copper coil pendant-sized energy balancing tools he calls his Mμ-Ankhs.

Right before we left for dinner, my dad and I were sitting in the living room area reading. Paul had called a little while earlier and said he was coming down tomorrow morning with Doug to go through all the house scenes and work out all the shots for each one with him. My dad got a serious look on his face talking about staying out of Paul's way so he could get his work done.

"You know, this movie will either make his career or not. If it works, he'll direct, if not, he'll be a scriptwriter."

"It'll work," I said, with a soul-buoying feeling and a longing.

"You don't know."

"A lot of people have put a lot of time and effort into this film."

A film is a vortex of energy. Paul had an idea that grew within him and radiated outward into the lives of those around him.

"I've always wanted to write a script with two teenage girls bored in suburbia and doing amazing things," Paul has told me. Then, in a burst of two weeks, a draft came out of him that was packed with archetypes that I explained to him when he asked me what I thought of it. When people found out about it, they started donating their time and resources to make it happen. Why? Because Paul is doing exactly what he wants to do and the passion that arises

from this shows and people are attracted to it and want to be a part of it. Your film is amazing but it's *you* they want, Paul, it's *you*.

Here I am now, tucked into my little room at the Laguna Niguel house, alone with my books and my thoughts and the burgeoning feeling of something amazing about to happen, a feeling that is distinct, yet if I were to try and trace back when it actually began to register on my radar, I'm not able to do it. Was it when I first opened my notebook and touched the pen to the page on the airplane two days ago? Was it last Friday when my boss Michael strode into the office bearing a bon voyage cake for me and we cut it up and the buzz was all about book writing and interviewing and movie sets, a surrounding "wow-you're-going-to-be-doing-that" energy from my co-workers, who couldn't possibly understand that this "I'm-doing that" was constantly carried around in me for the past several years, along with a wrenching thwarted feeling that wailed, "but-when? but-when?" They didn't see the life decisions I made, like taking this job, for instance, four years ago now, figuring it would be six months to a year and a half at the most. They send me off with a crash of a champagne bottle on the side of the ship and don't see the toil that went into building the ship myself, alone, working and going to bed and getting up the next day not knowing if any progress has been made or not.

Or was it when Andrew Harvey said, "Maria has to write *How Something Happened*." Or was it when *Something Happened* became a concept at all. Or was it when I wrote a dissertation and knew that there was another creature of words nascent within, waiting to take form and be born. Or was it when a rambling, 525 page science fiction teenage fantasy came out of me longhand on paper when I was thirteen? Or was it always there, really, never letting me alone, always feeling more right than anything else. That's it, isn't it, a feeling of rightness, of relief that basic survival is now recessive and my own inner calling is now at the forefront and everything is now as it should be.

My dad handed me a book this morning and told me it was like William Irwin Thompson, a brilliant cultural historian I studied with during my doctoral work. We had a conversation about my writing and the evolution of consciousness, my field of study. It was such a joy and a relief to be in the middle of a writing project again, tears came into my eyes as I

talked about Paul and his spirit and his will and perseverance to put his heart and soul out into the world.

Now we're on a trip to Marina del Rey, the apartment complex Paul wants to move to. It turns out to be quite infinitely more beautiful than the pictures suggest; there are flowing, terraced waterfalls that turn into sparkling brooks leading to large pools filled with koi and turtles and overhung with bridges. The foliage is dense around the balconies, palm trees and green, leafy California underbrush create a woodsy atmosphere and, because there is a gentle rolling hilly feel to the dark wood apartment buildings, little alcoves of balconies and brooks carve out private spaces all over the place. The on-site hairdresser, deli and small grocery store create a feeling of community and convenience. There is a small theater that seats twenty where private movie screenings can take place. The lobby has a 30 or 40 foot ceiling with what can only be described as a walk-in fireplace, maybe 6 feet high by 8 feet wide, with a stone mantle most of the way to the vaulted ceiling. The pool is a soft, wavy kidney shape that has an extra bend in it, and, again, its surroundings have a private, nature-tucked, invitingly warm aura. It was built in the seventies, which adds to its warm, slightly weathered allure.

After a stroll around there I treated my parents to a day at Venice Beach, which was nearby. As we were walking up the little strip before you get to the walkway that lines the beach and the beachfront houses, we passed a little café. At an outdoor table sat an over-suntanned man with a bare, hairy chest, dirty blond hair, a considerable beer belly and a gigantic peacock-blue parrot in his lap. The parrot had a pearl earring in his beak, which he had just stolen from a woman walking by, right out of her ear.

"He's a pirate!" she exclaimed, amazed.

"It's what he loves to steal the most, for some reason, pearls. He won't touch the ear, just the pearl."

"What's his name?" I ask.

"Rocky."

"Rocky! Wow, Rocky the pirate parrot."

We walked on and when we got to a food stand that sold coffee, I bought my mom and dad a cappuccino and a decaf latte for myself. Though windy, the sunshine and sand, the familiar patchouli oil and ocean smell and Eric Clapton piping from one of the shops snapped me

right back to a place when this was my home. Venice Beach has a special familiarity, having been a place where I spent a lot of time in the two years I lived in L.A.

"You're on my turf now!" I said to my parents, and bought them each a souvenir, a Venice Beach sweatshirt for my dad and a charcoal grey-brown weave purse for my mom. They bought me a white macramé hemp bracelet with chatoyant purple glass beads, which I tied on my wrist. I drove home along the L.A. highways and everything was right with the world.

As we were pulling into the driveway back in Laguna Niguel, my parents' turf, my dad exclaimed, "Who's that guy on the roof?" I looked up and saw Doug Shannon, the DP (director of photography), scouting out the lighting for some of the outside shots.

"It's Doug! It's Doug!" I exclaimed delightedly. He smiled at us standing down below and then disappeared from sight.

"I haven't seen you since *Freak*." Doug embraced me with a grin after descending from the rooftops.

"Yeah, that was...my God, eight years ago."

He pulled out his huge white loose-leaf notebook containing a copy of the script with his notes and sketches in the margins, as well as a map of each shot, to show me what he was doing. Sometimes, there were five or six shots in a row, a couple seconds per shot camera time, to create a particular mood. Shot one, Jennifer's bracelets slide up her arm as she raises it in slow motion; shot two, Jennifer pushes her hair out of her face, slo-mo, shot three, close-up of Jennifer's bikini strap from the back, and so on. There are little numbered greater-than and less-than signs (< >), which indicate where the camera is positioned for each shot. And there are *hundreds* of them, every detail is accounted for, the lighting at the time of day the scene is shot, the positions of the actors relative to each other, the camera angles. Doug opens Paul's book of Sally Mann's (Paul's favorite photographer) photography, *Immediate Family,* and shows me some photos that were inspiration for the way some of the shots are framed. I am enchanted and dumbfounded at the work that went into this shot listing. The book starts to feel sacred, like there are living people and images stored inside, preserved, waiting to be released, and they are fragile stored this way and must be cared for until they can be immortalized as moving pictures on film.

Paul's cell phone rings every fifteen minutes or so, but he often lets them leave a message because he and Doug are working so intensely. Doug told me that William had many insights

and suggestions about the script and the way things were shot, he said this with raised eyebrows and a tone of respect in his voice. "I wish I had a video camera during the rehearsals, it would have been a great on-site documentary."

Doug is tall and serious, with close-cropped black hair graying slightly at the sides, roundish thin-rimmed glasses, and a direct, professional air of being totally absorbed in his work. He is an avid sailboat racer, he lives in New York City in an apartment he owns with his girlfriend, and he has recently worked on Woody Allen films and the popular TV show *Sex and the City.*

Paul and Doug have been planning out the shot lists all day, stopping only to have dinner. When they resumed, I was recruited as a stand-in for Gina. We repeated shots over and over again, I traced my hand over and over on a piece of paper and leaned back in my chair, I sat on the bed pretending to rip up magazines and got up to look out the window to see what the noise was outside, over and over again, all seen through Doug's little lens that frames the shot as he would like it. I am clearly just a prop through this lens, an object which has light falling on it in a certain way and is a certain size and shape in the lens framing. I feel a little disoriented by this, not sure whether I'm supposed to be doing something under the objective stare until I realize what it is and why it is there.

Tomorrow morning, bright and early at 8 am, there is going to be a tech scout here. Jeff Beard, one of the producers, Teo Guardino, the production designer, and two or three others on the production end of things are coming to check out the space and plan out some of the technical, practical workings of the production of *Life on Mars.* I think about this weird world where a bunch of people come together and each are responsible of a part of this concept called *Life on Mars*, or, rather, each is responsible for tending to an aspect of the production that will bring these fragile, dependent, but actually real creatures in the shot book to life. They exist there, being carried around in Paul, in Doug, in the shot book, in me now, I can see them and see what they're doing, only others can't who haven't carried them around awhile, inside a chamber of heart and hope and inspiration, with tenderness and a promise of release whispered softly to them, as if trapped in a castle tower with miles of rocky terrain left to travel before the tower is even reached. And yes, they're there all right, real as can be, and we're coming, finally, we're coming to set them free.

And as promised, sure enough, a small group of valiant rescuers appear early in the morning the next day and start prowling around the grounds. I go out to meet them and am introduced around by Paul as his sister. Jeff, a tall, rugged-looking redhead with a beard, is one of the producers. Teo, the production designer, has dark hair, thick eyebrows and a restless energy. Ailee, the production coordinator, is probably the youngest of the bunch, in her early twenties, with an attractive mane of hair pulled back in a pony tail and fed through the back of a baseball cap. Michel, a co-producer in charge of transportation, has a slightly dark skinned well-groomed look with perfect white teeth, and Chris, a co-producer as well, is relatively short, slightly resembles Michel and has attentive brown eyes. Finally, Seth, an alternative looking rocker-type with red hair like Jeff's, an earring in one ear, and a wide leather watchstrap and leather bracelet, is introduced as the assistant director. Doug is present with a pull-cart brief case that contains his shot book and other equipment he might need. I am welcomed and the ragged early-morning crew resumes their meeting.

"Shooting scene 7 in front of the house at 5:30 at night. This is a continuation of scene 47 along the road, it just went into 48 here, a three part shot with sprinklers on. We need something in the yard of 31041 to recognize the spot for another shot...If Maria is Jennifer walking down the street this way...can you just turn around and walk the other way? Then it's a full-framed shot this way. Teo will set up a blower for leaves, it will blow from here to that driveway...If the audience wants to notice the few leaves, it's their choice. We can get a hose and trickle water down the gutters..." Doug's professional eye doesn't miss anything in its range, and the energy of the group surrounding him plays any supporting role it can. Paul lets Doug explain the shots to the group, and occasionally Paul and Doug figure out a shot together.

"Cool, how about maybe just a shot of the gutter with the water rolling?" Paul suggests, seeing the characters alive in his mind's eye.

"We can do that…we can insert that right here…"

"Shall we move on to scene 8?"

"8 is half a page, there are several shots…"

"Gina and Jennifer are walking to the pool. You can come in like this and end here...or follow." Doug turns to Paul for his input, his hand sticking up in the air with fingers poised in a gesture that Spider Man might make while he's shooting a web, if he happens to be shooting a web upside down.

"Question. Are you going to see the ground? Where do I run the hose?" Teo interjects anxiously.

"Yes, you're going to see the ground, you come in here and you see it flowing through here."

"Are there four shots of this whole thing?"

"Five."

"Are we shooting them in order?"

"It's a similar shot to shot one here but the truck and the hose need to get into position here," Doug points to his sketched map and list of shots. It is like he is the mapmaker and knows all the terrain of Middle Earth. There is no question he doesn't answer definitively.

"We'll get a permit or we're in violation," Jeff warns.

"Why are we in violation?"

"We're blocking traffic, we're running water, we're supposed to have a permit and have cops doing it."

"Why can't we have a PA do it?" A PA is a production assistant, someone who is on hand to do any odd job as it arises.

"Maybe we can get some security jackets. To do it right would cost a lot of money, three or four hundred bucks. We'll figure it out." *Three or four hundred bucks? That's a lot of money? But this is movie production!* Jeff files the information away and the discussion moves on.

"So the girls have run to here and land hereabouts..." Doug continues.

"Question," Teo interjects. "Is there going to be dialogue when the water runs?"

"No."

"We still need to plug in the monitor. We may have to plug it into one of the houses," says Teo.

"Can't we run it from an adapter from one of the vans?" Someone rapid-fires a solution.

"We can try that."

"What about getting one from Panavision?"

"Well, Panavision will give us whatever they give us, which may be incompatible with other equipment," Doug reins the conversation in with his practical air.

We move across the street.

Suddenly, my Dad's black rental car swoops around the corner. "Hey, son, you want the key to the pool?" Paul and I run over. My dad takes the pool key off the keychain and hands it to him.

"Come on, Maria, we have to go," my mom says. Paul and I hug each other and my parents whisk me off to a hair appointment that we made before any of this was in the works.

When I got back, the group had moved inside the house. At the kitchen table Jeff, with his sharp eye, sees an ad for discounted catering on the table, writes the deals down on a sheet of paper from my notebook, which I left unattended, tears it out and hands it to Chris with whispered instructions probably to look into it.

Doug was still in his instructing mode, walking the group through the shots and ironing out any glitches with Paul. At times I stand in for Gina again, in the kitchen and in the main bedroom.

"There are two scene numbers, 17 and 37, which are here and in which the important element is the plant. The scene is shot from here and the chandelier will go away."

"Well, I think we can just clip it up," Paul said.

"Then cut to a shot from here from below," the Spider Man hands indicated, "then scene 66 and 88; 66 is a time-lapse of the plant. We observe it Sunday morning then not again until 7:45. Scene 66 is shot only digital with time lapse."

This continues for quite some time. Eventually the meeting breaks up for lunch, and all the crew leaves except Teo, Doug, Paul and I. We pile into one car and go out to a Chinese place nearby for lunch. Teo tells me he's from Portland and his parents own a gallery, Guardino's, on Alberta Street, which I have been in. He knows Lem, the eccentric Asian lamp maker next door, who has artwork hanging from his ceiling and walls in his multi-colored, brightly lit studio.

"I thought I overheard you on the phone with William and he had some suggestions about lighting Crystal City and you didn't seem too thrilled with them. What are your thoughts? What is your vision of Crystal City?" Doug inquired of Paul.

"Well, there will be one central crystal and then others, clear or murky white quartz growing out of it."

"We have five opportunities to show it," Teo said, "scenes 53, 57, 65, 77, and 88E."

“Really...” Doug considered with raised eyebrows, “Let’s take a look at them.” We have ordered and are now waiting for our food. The place is dimly lit and we sit in a booth, the shot book now spread open on the table.

“Should there be growth in each one?” Doug inquires.

“Well, in the first one there’s not much growth, I imagine,” Paul replies pensively.

“No, but there should be a lot by the end, three stages of growth.”

“Question. I don’t like the way the schedule is laid out,” Teo blurts aberrantly. All heads turn to him. “It doesn’t make sense, it says Day 2 of shooting and then you have to look up here, before the Day 2. I’m so confused.”

“I don’t like it either, but its standard,” Paul says.

“It’s more helpful for me to print out my own, like this...”

I look on quietly the whole time this discussion is going on, and when our food comes, we eat and efficiently leave to go back to the house. Back in the garage, we stake out the scenes for Gina’s laboratory.

“How are we going to light it?” Paul looks at Doug questioningly.

“I was envisioning more pools of light, see, I was hoping it would be darker.”

"I definitely want it to be dark in the corners of the room," Paul muses.

“Well...I like this wall...the texture here is kind of cool, and I like the light from the windows,” Doug indicates the bare, worn wood rafters on the garage walls and the semi-circular windows near the top of the electric garage doors which had dividers in them that made the glass look like sun rays. Paul has confidence in Doug, in his theatre-trained eye, in the years of friendship and past projects between them that allows familiarity with each other’s professional style, and in Doug’s amazing ability to persevere until he gets exactly what he wants, exactly what he thinks is perfect and no less, despite any obstacles. “That angle...Maria, stand over there, and don’t look at me, look at your work, see, we can light it if we need to but from this angle it’s fine.”

“I’d like a cluttered look, even scatter some wood chips so you’re not quite sure what she’s doing,” Teo offers.

“The stereo has to be over here.”

“What about the angle from here?” Doug positions his Spider Man fingers in the air with unaffected authority, like a conductor from an alien culture.

"My first impression is that I don't like it, but I guess it's ok," Paul studies the area by the door leading into the kitchen. "I like weird mechanical shit." He means the hot water heater, that it's okay to have it in the shot. "I just wish it weren't tan and white. I guess what I'm reacting to is the white wall behind it."

"Well, there's white wall all the way to here."

"Where do you envision the ripped-open chemistry sets?"

"Some are at the end of the table, some strewn on the floor."

"Don't expect to see the floor unless we plan a shot of it."

"Well, some can be at the end of the table, she opened them to get out one particular chemical that she needed."

Teo suggests building up the clutter, tools and other equipment, as the scene goes on. Paul agrees but clarifies that Gina needs to begin only with the chemistry sets and the one chemical she needs, she pulls it out and tosses the rest aside. Then they start discussing having a Tesla coil. Paul had asked William if he would be willing to loan some of the energy tools he makes for Gina's laboratory scene. Hesitant at first, he later consented. As I described the TetraShield™ that William built by combining crystals with copper coils embedded in resin, Doug was rapt.

"It's got a clear resin base about a foot in diameter from which protrudes three copper tubes of varying heights, the tallest being about three feet high. Two circular copper plates connect the tubes and keep them centered above three copper coils in the base spaced exactly 120° apart. Each tube is capped with a resin finial containing beads and delicately wound copper coils."

"It sounds great, just the height and eye-catching uniqueness we're looking for." Doug flips through the script, scouring every detail Paul put in (where are the chemistry sets, but it says they're here...). Doug wants a spark or visible electric current or flash powder explosion to demonstrate Gina getting shocked, which is in the script. Teo draws pictures of the equipment he needs as the needs arise. They are writing on a wooden board propped on a garbage can. A boogie board they found in the garage and set up on another garbage can becomes Gina's work table.

Now they are huddled over the script, turned to page 18. "So we're going to forget this idea that she's boiling something, right, you just want some kind of reaction, right, is that what you're after?"

"Well, since there's no way to do that, yeah, just so there's something already happening, she's waiting and it's going pssshhhhh..."

Paul acts out a spouting stream animatedly in the air, waving his arms in a rapid wavy way and making a loud spurting hiss. When he acts something out he becomes what he is acting, when he recites lines from a film he becomes the characters, his amiable personality temporarily drops away and another character takes its place, like a moving picture version of those toy viewfinders we had as kids where you look into this binocular-like apparatus and push a button and this wheel of slides rotates so you can see a slide show, or like a cut in a movie to a scene from the past, just click, and there's something else.

"Maria, we need to go, honey," a pleasant alien voice cooed from the doorway, which turned out to be my mom. We are going to see friends of theirs from England, Joan and Charles White, for tea. My parents met Joan and Charles while they were renting a condo in Laguna Niguel a few years ago, and the two refined couples befriended each other rapidly, keeping in touch between visits to California and eventually renting houses near each other after Joan and Charles discovered the community which we were all now in. Despite sniffles that have been annoying me all day, I have been looking forward to it.

"Ooh, you look just like your brother," Charles greets me warmly, a poised and jovial man in his seventies with a surprisingly white smile he is very generous with. Joan, also in her seventies, has soft attentive eyes and a lively demeanor, and is also quick to smile and to connect to you with her sophisticated English accent and demeanor.

Joan and Charles are the type of people that you can really dialogue with, if you ask them something they address your question seriously and if you tell them something heartfelt they are all ears--and smiles. They look at me with impressed amazement when I tell them more about the film and the book. They serve us delicious homemade English scones and English tea in beautiful delicate white teacups with silver trim and solid silver spoons. They speak of the time they spent living in Brazil, since I mentioned whole-heartedly that William and I have been thinking of going to Minas Gerais for gems and crystals for years.

Charles had been some sort of high-ranking engineer in charge of a factory and they had a maid living with them there who had just had a child. The maid, though very good, was less desirable to many because of the child but Joan and Charles welcomed them both with open arms. They spoke of the lushness of the Sao Paulo hills and the valleys they visited right by the equator, especially some place that sounded like "Mesua." They had brought back furniture that still smelled like Brazil, and when Joan took me to her seven-foot-tall china cabinet and opened it as if warmly sharing a comforting treasure, I swear I could still smell rainforest in it. It was grand indeed, rustically but exotically carved, thick looking and exuding a dark, earthy, wild solidity. I loved it for its sheer massive character and I wondered how they got something so bulky back to the states. They had tables and sculptures and I could feel their time there through them, time spent setting up Western culture in an indigenous world, but with a love of that world coexisting simultaneously. Part of me wanted to turn against them for this, but they are so soft and jovial and generous with their demeanor that I accepted them as they were without resistance, with their money and their English formality and their honest caring and brightness. At one point Charles left the room in search of some audio tapes of Portuguese that he thought might be of interest to me.

Joan and Charles have four children, each successful and each living in different parts of the world. Their daughter Julie, who lives in California, was there with her husband Steve and their two children. As I told tales of the “book” I wrote when I was thirteen, a wild meandering 525 page science fiction story filled with all the adventure and spontaneity and sexuality that I did not yet have in my own life, little Joshua bounded in and handed me a drawing of a cup of tea. Joshua is about four and his sister, about six, came in with Julie and she had just told her mother that she wanted to write books and have me type them on the computer. I smiled at her purity and eagerness and said, “You’ll learn how to use a computer way younger than I did and you’ll be able to write and type them all by yourself. You just start writing and you write and write and there comes a moment where you realize you’ve written a whole book.”

With a burst of sudden revelation I remembered a conversation with Paul that we had at the bathroom sink late Wednesday night. We often talked at the bathroom sink when we were kids brushing our teeth before bed, and when we get together this custom often re-establishes itself in the most natural way. He was talking about how he spent all day Tuesday dealing with

money matters related to the film, about deciding which credit cards he should use for the deposits for various expenses, and that this was wearing him down and starting to cause bad associations with *Life on Mars*. I knew exactly what he meant. The movie is a living, breathing being, the images he speaks about come alive behind my eyelids too. In a very real sense, the movie *already exists*, just not in the outside world.

I remembered Gurdjieff's haunting words that thoughts are beings, that thoughts are *alive*, and immediately thought, *oh yes, they are, that's exactly what they are*. And then that incident while co-teaching "Paradigms of Consciousness" while writing my dissertation in the Psychology of Consciousness Evolution, that "exercise" that my teaching partner sprung on me that changed my life.

We were discussing mind and thought and prayer, and she asked me and two students to go and stand out in the hall, saying that she had a little exercise to illustrate some of our discussions. After a few minutes she called us back in and had us stand in a row facing the class. There was me, a young man, and a large man standing next to him. She stood by me and instructed me to hold out my right arm and keep it up as she pushed on it. She did this consecutively three or four times. Sometimes it seemed harder to hold my arm up than others, but she could always push it down. Then she moved to the first man and repeated the process. Then on to the big man. After this rather enigmatic demonstration she asked us what our experience was. We explained that sometimes it was harder to hold up our arm than others. She then revealed the purpose of the exercise, and my whole being flooded with awe and an undeniable certainty of greater realities.

"I told the class that when I touched my nose before I pushed your arms down, they were to think bad thoughts about you and direct them at you. When I touched my hair, they were to think good thoughts about you. You have less strength when there is negative energy coming at you. Everything is interconnected, is a whole; everything affects everything else."

I was stunned. I knew this to be true, though by standard conceptions of reality it was fantastical. If I accepted this, what did it mean? What did it say about thought, about prayer? What responsibility do I have for my own thoughts, directed at myself, directed at others?

And then, later on in my studies, discovering all those photos of water by Dr. Masaru Emoto, where words were spoken at water and then the frozen molecules were photographed under highly magnified lenses. When "love" was spoken, the water molecule resembles a many-

pointed, delicate, beautiful snowflake. When "Hitler" is spoken, the molecule looks like a violently dashed, twisted splash. How much of our bodies are made up of water...?

Paul's ocean blue eyes regard mine with trust and commiseration. "I was feeling really bad, depressed and kind of, ugh, but one hour of working with Doug planning the shots and all the inspiration came back. I had kind of forgotten, yes, *this* is why I am doing this." His whole body bounced at me with life. I smiled.

The blur of the ceiling became more and more focused as I came back to myself, prone on my back on the couch, the sniffles of yesterday having blossomed into a cold after all. *It's okay that I'm sick,* I thought. I haven't had a day this leisurely in a long time. The big outing of the day was a short walk with my parents at Treasure Island from about 11 AM until 12:30 PM, after which I immediately went to sleep.

Not long after I found myself all bundled up on the corner of Flying Cloud and Miramonte. It is 6:20 PM and I am standing here at the gas pipes protruding from the ground in the clearing where Gina and Stefan are to overlook the city and talk about Mars. Paul has assigned me the task to count cars so we can ascertain how busy the street is and set up the appropriate level of traffic control needed during the shoot.

I label two columns in my notebook, one that says "close lane" and one that says "far lane," and begin recording the number of cars that go by. I examine the area and realize that the close lane has a bend in it right ahead of where the camera crew will be standing in a blind spot on the other end of the curve. People turn from Montessa and park across the street. There is no parking in the close lane. It is one of those winding upper class California suburban streets with sleek communities of uniformly built houses in rows. They all have ample windows in which to gaze upon the sprawling city view below. The parking lane by the row of houses gets filled up with a line of cars. I realize that the shoot will take place within a circle of light shed by a streetlight. In the close lane, the next street light is a couple hundred feet down from the shoot. This means that a flagger in this lane needs to be a hundred feet down to be seen properly, but if they were, they would be in the dark. The cars do not drive slowly. Cars occasionally pass from both sides at the same time.

All the while I am noticing these things my nose begins to run like a draining water pipe. It is cold, even though I am in my Gore-Tex winter coat, and it begins to sprinkle. I have only one tissue with me and after it is used up I just bend over and shake my head and water comes

flinging out of my nose. I used to be a flagger for a couple of summers while in college, refusing to have to work indoors, what a waste and a crime against nature, really, and my father found me a temporary job flagging for the road crew, which I enjoyed enough and felt like I wasn't taken out of my life and my being in the process.

We would need two flaggers here, one on each side of the street, and the flagger in the far lane needed to be closer in, maybe 60 feet away, within the lighted circle of the next street lamp. I had a sense of what was needed to be safe at this point, and after maybe 40 minutes, walked a couple blocks to Diane's party, nose still a waterworks and sniffling and cold. A nice gentleman met me coming up the driveway with an umbrella. My mom was worried about me standing in the rain and the gentleman, who turned out to be Diane's neighbor, Pete, was coming to help.

I stayed at the party a little while. There were Middle Eastern appetizers and good wine and jovial conversation. Diane had renovated her house, which looked like all the others on the block from the outside except for some Mediterranean style garden work which enhanced its elegance, and her kitchen was done in cherry wood with granite countertops, and paintings by prestigious California artists decorated the walls. Not feeling well, I went home early and went to bed, only to awake late the next morning to my parents packing to leave.

They carried out this process with an air of being deliberate and intent on every detail. They had had a discussion yesterday on whether or not to ship the breadcrumbs home (dried bread my mom grinds up and uses to make meatballs), a discussion that evoked passion and definite opinions, opposing points of view and emotions. There was something old world and archetypally stable about that, something Mediterranean that evoked large amounts of home made pasta being cooked in a kitchen crowded with eight or ten relatives all having separate animated conversations at the same time while piles of food are served and laughter rings throughout the house through hazy rooms smelling of smoke and grease and red wine and timelessness. My mom cleaned everything again, dusted the tables that were not dirty, kept busy all day doing tiny loads of laundry consisting of matching items instead of dumping it all together and sitting down to read. I am still sick and napped on the couch, waking in a filmy daze to marvel at all this.

I have a *Life on Mars* crystal and a card for Paul. I will give them to him tonight. I bought him a crystal when he made *Freak* also, and I gave him a crystal for *Something*

Happened even though it is still stuck in development. It is a little ritual of ours, a talisman of good magic for each little creature of the imagination that will eventually show itself as a film.

The card is square with a pink-tinted picture of a young girl in a white dress running down a forest path. In handwriting-looking print in white letters at the bottom it says: "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom--William Blake." Inside on the left I taped a picture of Samwise carrying Frodo up the last stretch of climb to the mouth of Mount Doom. The note says, "February 12, 2006. Dear Frodo, You cannot go where I will not follow. No matter where the journey takes us, Samwise will be there in just the right way. Let *Life on Mars* show us the way, and if I can't carry it for you, I can carry you. Always yours, Samwise."

The crystal is a pale amethyst from Mexico with a clear point and a murky base. The clarity of the point is unusually sharp because, although it is so pale it almost looks like quartz, it has a flawlessness to it that Arkansas quartz does not have. It is drilled and strung on a black cord with a clear and a pewter bead on each side. I showed it to my mom in the afternoon and she read the message and cried.

"I'm so glad you're close. Please stay that way, you have to help each other."

"We will," I replied. She worries about us not having families of our own to turn to at the age we are now. She only has one brother and when she moved away from New York City and both she and her brother got married and had children, they saw each other less and less and lost track of the details of each other's lives. "Remember, we're almost 40 now, if it hasn't changed by now, it won't," I reassured her. "Paul and I have the same heart and soul. We'll always understand each other."

I paused for a moment to stand with my parents at the window to see the sunset. "All the yellows and pinks and reds, you could never paint that no matter how hard you tried," my mom mused.

There is a feeling of sadness that creeps in as the time to depart from a vacation place draws near. Everything takes on a more solemn air and the tiniest moments of tenderness that were barely noticed before hold swells of emotion, a joy of time shared mixed with a bereavement of time ending.

My dad does more of the cooking and washing up since his retirement, he is preparing pasta for when Paul and Doug arrive tonight. We will take them to the airport tomorrow

morning and then begin to work here at the house in preparation for production, a mere week away. A song from the seventies keeps going through my head, it is perhaps John Denver,

"Sweet, sweet surrender
live, live without care
like the fish in the water
like the birds in the air."

I suppose some part of my consciousness is preparing to be swept up in a demanding process I am not familiar with and that I have been anticipating for four years.

As my dad cooks and I putter around helping, my mom is reminiscing about Paul and his circle of friends during their college days. She was remembering how Bryan Singer used to borrow Paul's socks.

"He lost three dozen of them. He used to borrow Paul's sport coats. People don't realize what directors go through. They say, 'Oh, he's a director, he makes soooo much money.' But it's not given to them. They work hard and struggle for many years. Bryan used to sleep on the floor between Paul and Ellis. He was afraid to be alone."

"That was when he was 'coming out of the closet,'" I reminded her. I smiled, remembering running around L.A. with them all, Paul and Bryan and Stas and Ethan, watching movies and eating with Dr. Reed at his Dracula club where they had a huge buffet and you had to be a member or a guest to get in.

"It's not easy to start out," she repeated, gravely. "People don't see the process, they don't see what it takes."

Paul and Doug have arrived in time for dinner. "It's brilliant," Paul beams. "That day you were traffic scouting and went to Diane's party and met Pete, well, it turns out that Pete would love to be involved in the film and is allowing us to run a long extension cord from his house down to the site of the shoot."

I get the fleeting sense that, although many aspects of making a movie are thoroughly planned out and organized, there are wild free radicals always whizzing about, blazing along and opening up surprise opportunities, the thing seems to have a mind of its own and is gathering momentum. It is let loose and guided, but not fully controlled. At the far reaches, no one is in

control of this film. It is a living entity in and of its own, like a growing hurricane with an eye that gets bigger and bigger.

"Also, Diane said the two pools switch on March 1st so that the pool that was originally heated now won't be, but she is arranging us to shoot in the pool that we already scouted out when it gets heated. They don't keep both pools heated all the time in winter," Paul informs me.

Paul turns to Doug and explains, "Diane is the real estate agent playing Jennifer's mom." It turns out that Paul has met the woman in charge of the pools, and the conversation went something like this.

"So, what is it that you're doing?"

"We'll be shooting a film here, right here in this community."

"Really, hmm, what kind of film? Will it be a Sundance film?"

Paul said, "Yes, exactly, that's the idea."

She immediately brightened. "I was at Sundance last year, I loved it. My favorite movie was *The Squid and the Whale*."

Paul chuckled with controlled delight pregnant with the sense that the universe is as it should be. "Do you know that the older son in *The Squid and the Whale*, Jesse Eisenberg, is in my film? And Doug Shannon, who worked on the film as well, is the DP!"

"Really? That's amazing! It was such a wonderful film, I enjoyed it tremendously. Well, you can use this pool so your actress doesn't freeze."

As the family plus Doug gathered around the dinner table, my mom discovered that Doug does not eat red meat or cheese so that he could not eat the raviolis she had fixed. She was disturbed and taken off guard and bustled off to warm up some vegetarian paella for Doug.

Paul, remembering an earlier conversation, said, "At the production meeting they asked, 'Does anyone have any food restrictions?' People said things like, 'I don't eat meat,' but Doug said, 'I don't eat red meat, cheese or sugar, but...'" Paul bent over and chuckled boyishly and gleefully, imitating the exaggerated essence of Doug's slow, calm, meticulously chosen speech, "'but if you have bread and wa-ter, I'm happy.' And he meant it!"

"Well, it looks like I'm never going to live that down..." Doug smiled sheepishly.

They talk about film, about how Woody Allen doesn't direct his actors, he just instructs "louder, softer, bigger, smaller" and doesn't give anybody the whole script while they're filming, just the scenes they're in.

"You'd be a good script supervisor," Paul said to Doug, pondering his temperament.

"That's not really interesting, though."

"But you'd be good at it, you'd *be* efficient. In order to do it well you have to have a lot of practice and do a lot in 15 seconds with the stop watch and all."

"Well, I think it would be more fun to be a producer or maybe an AD."

"An AD?" Paul asks, surprised.

"Well, I like being in the hot seat, not dealing with problems that you still have a month later--"

"Yeah, like financing," Paul interjects with a feeling of gravity.

"--but the kind of thing you can fix in fifteen minutes. Ok, here's the problem, do this and this and--bang!" (he claps sharply) "you're done!" Doug smiles a composed, twinkling smile after his little demonstration. "I know people, like my girlfriend for instance, she's a graphics designer and she won't even be a gaffer because she doesn't like the pressure..." *Methodical and ultra-organized, yes, but definitely not the accountant type,* I thought, smugly.

There is a subtle rapport between Doug and Paul, a sense of mutual respect and a history of two stable but different reputations that are both better off for the other one. They turned to more lighthearted topics, thoroughly immersed in the mindset of the rapidly approaching time of production, like training or boot camp before a war. They can never act or think outside the project, not because it is forced in any way, but because it is a creature that had its genesis in Paul's mind and spirit, then was transmitted to Doug and Doug grew it too, and then the knowledge of its existence was passed to the production crew who are nurturing it and meeting its needs so that it can grow big and strong and visible to all, so that it can pass from the realm of imagination to the realm of the big screen and live in the hearts and minds of all who lay their eyes on it. It is interesting and amazing, this beautiful fragile creature that makes Paul's eyes sparkle with life and excitement and purpose, this being that lives within him and will soon be released. I can feel it. It is growing vibrantly within me too.

"Directors say 'cut' in totally different ways, have you noticed?" Doug was bantering subtly with Paul. "Some say it so softly that you keep rolling because you're not sure you heard it right, and some go 'CUUUUUUUUUT!' Some say it ten times like 'cut cut cut cut cut cut cut!'"

"Yeah," Paul laughs, amused that Doug is acting all these ridiculous things out, "that's my new thing, I'm going to start obnoxiously yelling cut cut cut--" Paul throws his hands in the air and grins devilishly and waves his fists above his head. *He would never yell 'cut' like that on set, that's not him at all, that's what makes it funny.*

"I think saying 'cut' too much signals to the actors that they're doing a crappy job," Paul said seriously. "All you need to do is say 'cut' once to instruct the actors to stop, that's all I did on *Freak*." Paul looks curiously at Doug. "Who else is around from *Freak,* anyway, besides us? Heidi, the costume designer, what happened to her? And the script supervisor?"

"Heidi, she was strong, she lifted boxes like they were a feather," said my mom.

"Well, set girls are often kind of burly."

Doug wanted to know what my parents have been doing on their vacation. My dad said they were taking a lot of walks, and that they were just by the waterfront at Treasure Island. "There was an advertisement being filmed for Home Shopping Network at Treasure Island when we were there. You know in order to get your product on that you have to have something like 20,000 items or they won't let you on because you sell that many in 20 minutes." Paul shoots him a look of horrified disbelief. He would never buy anything from Home Shopping Network, something like that would never cross his mind. "There are people who watch this 24 hours a day and it's an addiction," my dad said.

After dinner I gave Paul his crystal and his card. As he opened the card he said, "What's this color, it's shocking..." the whole image of the running girl was in various shades of pinkish mauve. He opens it, enraptured. There is a pause. Then, "There's a picture of Frodo and Sam, this ties into the first card you gave me which is Frodo and Sam departing from the Shire, in this one Sam is carrying Frodo on his back because he can't even walk..."

It is Sunday morning and we are saying goodbye to Mom and Dad in a flurry of hugs, kisses and wishes for a safe trip about 9:30 AM. The sun is shining brightly and the day feels full of potential. My cold is a lot better and I feel like I'm opening to the day like a flower. It was very sweet, the way they walked out the door, all smiles and eye twinkles, my mom a flurry of housekeeping advice, "See, here's the squeegee hanging here, just put a washcloth clipped to the bottom, remember, and it will not soak the floor, oh, and throw the two towels in the kitchen in the hamper--"

“What hamper?”

“Not a hamper...there’s a basket in the closet.”

“Ok Mom, I love you.”

“Bye, you guys make a great movie, y’hear?” chimed my Dad.

“You bet we will.”

Chapter 4

Behind the Scenes

"We need a high wide of the street and we're not going to have a crane."

Paul and Doug are scouting out shots on the street near the house. Row after row of pale beige houses line the street. Each has a short driveway and a little manicured yard and a courtyard behind a wrought iron gate. Some people have replaced the concrete in the courtyard with Italian tiles or installed a fountain, but the area, although peaceful, well kept, with a beautiful view and an apparent sense of wealth, has a uniformity that can't help but feel somewhat oppressive.

"Well, this is all terraced, you could take a shot of a lower terrace from a higher one," I suggest innocently.

"You know, you're right!" Paul exclaims, delighted. "We keep forgetting that. Hey, Doug! Come here! Here's your high wide!"

Doug drags his very large briefcase on wheels, which is almost a travel suitcase, down the street. A door opens at 31021 and an elderly lady with snow-white hair and pale peach glasses steps out and peers at us curiously. We suddenly realize that we are standing in her yard. Doug is busy with his framing lens and doesn't even notice.

"Oh, hello." Paul congenially approaches her. "I'm Paul. We are just taking some beauty shots."

She regards him directly. "I'm Alice. I hope you don't get me in the picture."

"No, we're just taking some shots of all the houses in the neighborhood. My parents are renting the one at the end on the right."

“Oh, okay." With the realization that we are staying in the neighborhood, she dismissed our intrusion casually. She turns to the foliage in her own impeccably groomed yard. "You know, I had a beautiful corkscrew juniper here on the corner and the yard workers came and pulled it out and planted this tree here. I loved that tree but they said I couldn’t keep it.”

I am taken off guard by this, and retort indignantly, “Why not? That’s not right. It’s your own yard.”

“There’s a bunch of old men on the board and they don’t really have regard for people, they just do what they want. They told me it was interfering with the water line, which is here.” We look down at where she is pointing and see a gray box in her yard. “But I asked the water guys and they said no, it wasn’t. The board just didn’t like it. I told my kids that they could fix this place up and sell it and make a lot of money.” *She's telling her own kids not to live here. They don't own their front yards. She knows it. It's just another instance of a veneer of wealth and perfection overlaid on a reality based on some measure of injustice, or, at the very least, just common imperfection. I'm sure the taxes these people pay on these places are unjust, and if the property value should ever go down, the taxes won't, and neither will the amount of money they owe on their mortgage, and if the discrepancy between what they paid for the place and its devalued worth grows too great they lose their house, which is absolute madness. The banks, the entities with the most wealth and the least toil come out on top, unjustly, of course. So the least these people should be able to do is plant their own choice of trees in their own paid-for front yard without a hassle.*

“The house two doors down from my parents’ is for sale," I said. "They were asking $875,000 and it didn’t sell so they lowered it to $825,000 and it still hasn’t sold yet."

Alice gave a soft snort. “Yes, that’s a little high.”

I shot a significant glance at Paul, who smiled back at me, then at Alice with his warm blue eyes. "Thank you for the use of your yard," Paul nodded, chivalrously.

“Nice meeting you, Alice.” I thank her warmly.

Paul and Doug continue their shot listing, standing on the edge of Alice’s yard and then beginning to move a little down the street. A few minutes later a Lexus drives up and the woman at the wheel starts rolling her window down, peering out behind furrowed brows.

“Oh, hello.” Paul smiles congenially as he and I approach her. Doug is busy with his huge binder of a shot book, making subtle changes.

"I was just wondering what strange people are doing in the street."

"Oh, well, my parents are renting the house at the end of the street and we're doing a little photographing," Paul says, kindly and patiently.

"Oh, okay," the woman says, placated that we actually belong there and are not trespassing on her public thoroughfare. "I'm just looking for my uncle's house, I know it's around here somewhere." She drives off and Paul and Doug ask me to walk down the middle of the street slowly as they circle around me as the roller bladers are to do in the movie.

"We go around like this...no, we can be a little closer to her."

"We don't want to crash into each other." I circle around Paul walking three or four times at different speeds so he can compare them.

"Okay, back to 1, a little slower this time."

The scene was originally of Gina walking and five young boys on rollerblades circle around her from different directions. Then they changed it to four boys and a mom.

Paul walks through the scene in his head. "There is a full frame profile of her walking down the street and we should let it play longer than you would think we should and they circle around, a profile dolly, the boys enter and crisscross and then cut to her POV. Then a high wide. That's four shots."

When Paul and Doug agree and have made detailed notes, we pack up Doug's roller briefcase and drive to Pete and Robert's house. Pete comes out all smiles and welcomes us in with a genteel manner. We are shown around the house, through a bathroom with cherub wallpaper, through rooms decorated with flair, art on the walls and sculpture on the tables, and out back to a patio with hanging bleeding heart plants and colorful tropical flowering potted plants in peach and mauve. The view from the back is perfect for the shot where I was scouting cars.

Their cat Casper, big and fluffy and grey, comes drifting out like a puffball of a ghost. We learn that Robert is from Calabria, the region in Italy where my mom was born. They bought the house for $430,000 five years ago and remodeled it, and now it has been appraised at $950,000, especially on the corner lot with a view of nearly 360 degrees. They are attentive and cordial and very much interested in what we are doing. Our electrical problems are now completely solved for the city view shot where Gina and Stefan are looking at Mars because Pete

and Robert have offered us their yard. This takes us off the street entirely and traffic control is no longer an issue.

As we are walking out the door Diane and her friend Christine pull up in Diane's car. She gaped at us briefly with a totally puzzled look, not expecting us to be there. They are coming back from the farmers' market and Diane invites us in to her house for a formal tour, since Paul has not seen it yet. She has two Edgar Payne paintings as well as Ann Hill, Jessie Botke and several other well acclaimed west coast artists, many of which she has lent to museums. Diane has spoken with the woman in charge of the pools, and said she would reserve the heated pool in Diane's name for a day and is awaiting word tomorrow if this is approved.

"Wow," Paul says, "she has some amazing art." We are now sitting in Taco Bell having lunch. Paul's cell phone has already rung once and it now rings again. "No ... yes, but I think that would be too much. Maybe we can put a kind of abstract brush stroke painting above Jennifer's bed that William could do or something. And also I thought sunflowers would be a good idea..."

After lunch we went into each restaurant in the strip mall and collected menus for potential caterers during production. Back at the house we did more scouting outside and went meticulously through all the kitchen and garage scenes. I was a stand-in for Gina. I traced my hand over and over at the kitchen table and leaned back in my chair with my hands behind my head. I felt that peculiar sense of being an object to be lighted, not a human with an opinion and an experience of the goings on, but a thing that is positioned and turned around and scrutinized, like a statue in a museum being gazed at from different angles with an appraising eye by an art aficionado. Scenes were mapped out in great detail and some shots were changed to angles that worked better. Intensely focused, Paul and Doug spin the many spokes of their rapport.

"The director of a show I worked on as an assistant editor tried to give me directing tips when I was on set," Paul mused. "He never left his chair, probably because he's so big. He broke four director's chairs and they would take out the broken one with slick efficiency and rush in with another one. He just directed yelling from his chair. How can you even see what's going on or feel involved with your actors? When he told me something I thought, 'I'm going to do the exact opposite.'"

Doug smiles, erasing something in his shot book with an eraser that looks like a thick pencil and feeds the eraser through a plastic tube just like a mechanical pencil feeds lead. Doug

is never without this, because he writes and draws in pencil and is always cleanly erasing and improving their layout for any given scene. He is respectfully amused by Paul's animated passion. He is set up around the makeshift chemistry table in the garage, and they are working on the chemistry scenes.

"So, when the chemical reaction is taking place, do you want it bubbling over on to the table?"

"No ... well, yes, it can be bubbling over too, but stuff needs to be shooting out of the beaker, sssssssst ... " Paul flutters his hands above the board serving as the chemistry table and grins at Doug.

"Okay so you want it...spurting..." Doug speaks abstractly as he writes in his shot book.

My Dad said that Doug is "all business." He is very efficient at what he does and communicates what he wants very definitively while conducting business, expecting his instructions to be followed without question. "Doug and Paul are two of a kind," my dad also says. In some ways they are, in terms of dedication to their work and the standards they set for themselves regarding their work, but their personalities are different, Paul being more engaging with people and Doug being more reticent and tending to the technical details.

Paul, overjoyed and unable to contain his I'm-finally-making-a-movie energy, starts kicking around a red plastic cup that is hanging low from the garage ceiling. I look over and, leaving my stand-in post, start doing it too. Doug doesn't even notice, bent intently over his book. He looks up when he realizes I'm no longer there.

"Maria, could you stand right here? Good...now you're sorting out and mixing up chemicals...Paul..." Paul comes running over, arriving with a bounce. "What do you think of this?" He hands Paul his lens. "Yes...I like this, yes."

"Okay, now what about the dancing? Have you seen Samantha dance?" Doug asks.

"Yes, it's good. It's very girlish."

They position themselves right inside the kitchen doorway and instruct me to dance in the garage passing the doorway. "Aaaaand...action!"

I start dancing around. "More, move around more...yes, now spin around...yes yes...okay...cut! Back to 1."

I snap back to my original position. We go through this a few times. The dancing will ideally be set to Joan Jett's *Run Away*.

At about 8 pm everybody realized they were starving. We piled in the car, Doug toting his wheeled briefcase, and stopped at Von's grocery store so that I could buy a binder for my copy of the script. Then we went to Subway at 8:50 pm and had to get it to go because they closed at 9:00. We checked our e-mail in the parking lot of Diedrich Coffee down the hill, the only wi-fi in the area.

We ate at the house. "Paul, look! Who am I?" I suddenly burst out, grinning at him conspiratorially. Paul turned to me. I had my napkin folded in half and draped over my mouth with both hands, eyes half closed and sagging shoulders. Paul laughed and Doug looked over inquisitively.

"You'll meet Stas," Paul told Doug. "It's funny, he used to go to the same place for lunch every day...for years! I'm not kidding, he'd go to Souplantation, you know, one of those buffet places that serves all-you-can-eat soups and salads and pastas...it's terrible...the food is all salty and gross...but he went because there were coupons in the L.A. Weekly that you could rip out and he would rip out a bunch and use them every day. Everybody knows him there now and once the manager came out and said, 'Hey, you know, that guy is here every day! Let's give him a free meal..."

I was laughing behind my napkin and Doug was laughing and making a half-disgusted face at the same time. Doug's mother is a pioneer in the raw foods industry and Doug grew up eating really healthy, long ago having given up red meat, cheese and sugar.

Stas, a long-time USC friend of Paul's, recently got laid off from his script reading job and had picked up a job doing camera work through a friend. That job ended and he has been collecting unemployment. It is not unusual for people working in the film industry to be on unemployment on and off sporadically because, for example, television comedy seasons are about four to seven months of work per year. Low budget films offer maybe three to eight weeks, and high budget films three to five months per film. A one hour drama show can keep cast and crew employed for ten or ten and a half months per year. No job is full-time permanent. When the job ends, you network and find another, in the meantime living on unemployment. Sometimes you hook up with your next job during the one you're on. Paul has done this several times as he worked at putting his films together.

After dinner we went through the scene when Gina answers the phone in the bedroom. As a stand-in, I was to sit gazing out the window and when the phone rang, just sit there as if

nothing was happening until the third ring, where I spastically sprung up and rolled across the bed and fell on the floor on the other side where the phone was and answered it calmly as if I hadn't done that. Then they went through the shots of the transformed plant in the living room after Gina's elixir was poured on it.

Doug sits back in his chair in the kitchen, hands hanging limply at his sides, closes his eyes and tilts his head back, "I'm happy with what we've covered, but I'm in such a state of exhaustion every night."

It is 11:30 pm and we get ready for bed. "You take the space heater, Paul, don't take a chance," I urge him. He is trying to get me to take it into my room as well, because I am still not totally over my cold.

"No, your room is colder than this one, you take it," he insists. I ended up taking it and it was lucky that I did because I woke up about 5 am coughing, took a Halls cough drop, and went back to sleep around 6:30am, dreaming of myself as a journalist of some sort with a notebook, reeling bleary or drugged through the hallways of what might have been the California Institute of Integral Studies where I got my Ph.D., or maybe the University of Southern California, and Paul had instructed a band playing unusual instruments to set up and begin to play, and I was running, laughing, not to miss it, looking for the room and passing a gymnasium with martial arts people practicing, and even the hallways were sunny. I was in charge of the jewelry, beaded necklaces and jewelry of silver and gold, but spilled it all over in my delirium.

We finished the small bedroom shots in the morning, including the scene when Jennifer "trips out" on the elixir Gina gives her, and the hallway shot when Stefan comes in and tells Gina that Jennifer is dead. I served as a stand-in again and cleaned up after breakfast. When I walked in the living room and asked Paul if he heard me coughing last night he looked at me kind of straight and concerned. When I looked in the mirror I was white with red, parched lips.

Now we are in the car going back to L.A. Keith, the celebrity photographer and Paul's friend of many years, called Paul and they discussed when to purchase the film. Doug said he needed it on Thursday.

Paul's phone rings again just as he hangs up on the first call, and he answers it.

"Hi Marina, it's Paul...wait, what about your e-mail? Okay. They are, it's getting close...Are you instructed to bring clothes to the meeting? One thing I was wondering is do you have any kind of white dress you can walk around in?...And it is how long?...Interesting. I think

that's fine. Is it thin or thick fabric?...Does it have a flow to it?...Does it expand on the sides?...Right. I see. Well, definitely bring that so I can see it. We need something for Jennifer to wear when she's coming home to her mom. Do you have any photographs of yourself hanging out...yes, either as a kid or in the last year or two. Gather all those if you can, also other items you think of...Yes, as soon as possible, in the next three days, four days, so we can start prepping..." Paul pauses and looks up Martine's, the costume designer's, phone number in his day runner, which he reads slowly over the phone. He does all this as he's driving.

Doug now gets on his cell phone. "We wanted to have a one eight five mat on the dailies, it can't go on the initial transfer, which is an excellent suggestion and obvious in retrospect...We need to create a one eight five mat for the dailies..."

Paul makes one call after another, dealing with a thousand details. I am getting used to this world, communication here often takes place by sticking your hand up in the air, fingers poised like an upside-down Spider Man to indicate camera angles, numbers shouted out to indicate scenes, a world right now seen through a little lens that Doug wears around his neck which he uses to frame every shot. His world is so thorough, his massive book of every detail of every shot always open, numbered lines drawn down the side to indicate the duration of every shot in every scene; sometimes there are several. There are utterly detailed sketches of each frame and where each person is standing, with a written description of each shot next to it, post-it notes indicating things in process. He has sketched maps of each shot where he draws a "<" or ">" to indicate the camera. Colored divider tabs mark sections for electrical, AC, film and other areas of a DP's responsibility so he knows what's happening every step of the way. Doug is always calm and instructive, and very, very organized.

All this as we barrel down the 5 North to the 10 West to Los Angeles, the City of Angels, fallen angels they may be, but there's still magic there.

Suddenly I hear, "Matterhorn Mountain, guys!"

Paul pauses on the phone to point out the white peak of Matterhorn Mountain and the spiked white cone of Space Mountain. We are passing Disneyland. He jubilantly waves as I gaze out the window and wave along.

As we are driving, I look through his folders relating to business surrounding the film. There is a red folder containing the latest proposed shooting schedule. Crew call 7 am, wrap at 7:30 pm. He has a copy of the script with all the attendant maps, sketches and shot descriptions,

a script breakdown of the props for each location, what is needed and if they have them already. For example, "Gina's house--outside; Scene 7, 34, 64, 88B. Flats of pink and white flowers, greens--shrubs and plants, light on in neighbor's garage, sparklers. Scenes 24, 25, 26, 29. Big plant, smaller patio table--maybe use chairs, tall ivy, hanging ferns (4-6), wind chimes, welcome mat, path lights, delivered boxes--different sizes, different companies, **large note "Are you dead?" This list is six pages long.

The copy of the budget is also six pages long and daunting in its detail. There is a "Summary of Estimated Production Costs" delineated as follows:

1. Producers and Crew
2. Transportation and Location
3. Wardrobe, Hair, Animal
4. Grip, Lighting
5. Set Deck, Props, SPFX
6. Camera, Sound
7. Film stock, Process & Print
8. Miscellaneous

Then: Insurance
Production Fee
Talent Labor& Expenses
Post Production

This is all broken down in a detailed spreadsheet of over 300 lines. The contracted total for the first half of the film, shockingly, is $38, 930.

Paul's blue folder has a contact sheet for the cast and crew, a meeting schedule, a Crew Deal Memorandum for money exchanges, an emergency contact sheet, and maps and directions to various locations. Paul is on the phone with the person finding the roller bladers now. They are to be young boys about ten or eleven years old. Paul speaks about the scene as a "kind of a performance."

At one point Paul looked at his watch and realized that the date had changed 12 hours too late again. "I can't wear this watch until I can figure it out and I don't have time to do that now."

"Why don't you wind it around by hand twelve hours, then it should work," Doug suggests, looking down at the watch. He examines it as if his mind is going through three stages: problem, suggestion, problem fixed.

Paul tries it. His watch is a stainless steel and 18k gold Rolex inscribed and given to him by our father for Christmas. It is an heirloom of 19 years. The inscription, a quote from Homer, reads "non omnis moriar," *I will not die unknown, for I live in my work*.

The deluge of phone calls seems to be over for the moment and Paul puts on Donovan's *Season of the Witch* on his car stereo, which he hopes to get the rights to use in the film, along with Donovan's *Atlantis* and Joan Jett's *Love is Pain.* "Except what they mean as breaking up with your boyfriend, I mean as the love of God entering the spirit in the film." Not in the sense that God's creation is bleak and painful, but that evolving your consciousness, going through the refiner's fire, is liberating and at the same time painful as the ego is stripped away.

I recall Evelyn Underhill's five stages of mysticism: awakening of the Self to the Divine, purgation, illumination, dark night of the soul and union. Interestingly, at least two of these five stages, purgation and dark night of the soul, are predominantly difficult, filled with pain and doubt.

The first stage, awakening, is usually a quick "aha" experience in which a psychic opening to the Divine takes place from a state of ignorance and is, therefore, filled with utter delight and even a manic exaltation in which everything seems possible and all those possibilities are inviting. Purgation is the period in which the work that needs to be done becomes apparent, it is an undoing of all the coping patterns and selective attention on functioning in a society with many corrupt elements, an unraveling of the ego in favor of the search for truth, for life, for earth and its realities of growth and creatures and seasons and the sense of every action and its consequences. Illumination takes place when enough of an alignment with living and interconnectedness beyond the small self and its desires and goals has established itself. This is often described as "detachment from desires" or "awakening to Reality." After all this is accomplished, the dark night of the soul, or "mystic death" creeps in. This is a final purification towards the Divine, but it feels like a death, a total absence of the Divine. It is a place in which partial awakening becomes intolerable and complete surrender finally becomes the only way, come death or destruction. Only through these stages of toil and trial is union with the Divine, a state of oneness with all the many facets of reality as they are, finally possible.

I look over and Paul is smiling knowingly at me through the rear view mirror. "I was walking down the street by Fay's, Maria, you know the street, right when you cross Church Street and enter that big open area, and I was listening to the Guru Gita, and I remember it was 1999, maybe 2000, after I finished *Freak,* and these four roller bladers came up and were swirling around...the way I remember it was a short mom and the boys were maybe twelve and taller than her. Everything seemed to be happening in 'slo-mo.' It was really a mystical experience for me. That was in my head. Now we have Gina walking down the street with a bunch of roller bladers swirling around her, with her leading them like a flock of seagulls..."

The three of us clambered into Paul's apartment laden with luggage, past the Henry Miller essay taped to his front door. William was in the kitchen with bright sunlight on his work table and his mostly white beard, lighting it up. He had a timelessness about him, like a wise sage or alchemist in a ray of sunlight with a calligraphy brush. I went to him and hugged him hard until I trembled, stroking his face. "I missed you, " he whispered.

Paul's place is different than I have ever seen it. There are boxes of props stacked by his CD and video shelves, deflated air mattresses and suitcases with clothes spilling out of them on his couch, a box labeled "Lee Filters" and a red duffel bag on the floor by the side of the couch. He has a large one bedroom apartment in a restored building in the Miracle Mile district that has been around since the early 1900's. He has everything he needs to live and for his work in that apartment, and not a lot of extra. He keeps it neat and there is an open space feeling in the middle of the living room. A small upright piano sits by one of the windows, which looks out through bars onto the parking lot by the building. His computer desk where his iBook is often open is to the left while facing the windows, and the kitchen is through a doorway to the right.

Behind the couch is a doorway, which leads into a little dressing alcove or walk-in closet with a vanity mirror and built-in desk and linen cabinets. To the right of that is open closet space where many of his clothes are hung. Between the dressing alcove and the bathroom, on the left, is a doorway to the bedroom, which is fairly spacious. Paul had room to line the walls with bookshelves and position his bed in the middle of the room. Above his bed is a canopy made of a sort of fine white netting with sun and star multicolored glitter sprinkled in the draped top. The canopy is hung from the ceiling and the four curtained sides that would enclose the bed are tied back in each corner. Pieces of black velvet are nailed over the windows throughout the

apartment and are let down when we watch movies in the living room on his fifty-inch high definition television set or when he wants to sleep in a warm cozy environment.

These additions to his otherwise fairly austere and unembellished living and work areas were added for his bohemian bash of a birthday party on September 30, 2001, when he had a wild theme party based on the setting of the movie *Performance* by Nicolas Roeg, with abundant candles and hors d'oeuvres and champagne, and a dress code that stated that bohemian costume was required, the less of it the better. His bedroom had a bouncer positioned at the door and a sign reading "Girls Only." He and a bevy of girls were the only ones allowed in that room, and Paul had grapes and body paints and markers with which to draw on the papered walls. The canopy and black velvet accoutrements were put up then, and left up for the joy and magical atmosphere they provided afterward. This atmosphere is familiar to me, having been here when I left my own little apartment in L.A. to move to Portland, Oregon to be with William. It is the clutter of props and camera equipment that catches my eye, an unusual sight in Paul's perennially organized and mildly minimalist abode.

Doug is working at Paul's folding table, which he set up in the living room near the kitchen door, with his computer and the shot book, "the bible," as I called it in the car. Doug raised his eyebrows in agreement and said, "Yeah. It gets more and more valuable until it gets Xeroxed."

Paul is showing me his contact sheet, briefing me so that I can serve him as his personal assistant. He shows me his mailing supplies, his day runner full of phone numbers, gives me housekeeping instructions, tells me where the post office and office supply and grocery stores in the area are.

There are piles of what look like white monster shit on the floor and on the kitchen table, huge sprayed patties of solidified white foam which may eventually become the Crystal City which Gina grows in her laboratory, but right now are exactly that, bizarre white patties that look like a cross between shaving cream and the by product of some albino alien cow. Other art supplies are spread out over and under the kitchen table, which has been transformed into a mini art studio.

Paul has a conference call at 6:30. Oops, no, by some miscommunication it is now at 7:30, Paul finds out by making a call. We decide to go to the East India Grill for dinner and Paul

begins his conference call outside and I order for him. I am now in personal assistant role and will remain in that role constantly for the duration of production.

I ask Doug what his next step is as Director of Photography. He says he has to get the lighting and photographic equipment together from Panavision. He also has to buy the film soon. Then he has to do some tests and get them developed and communicate any changes he wants. To help conserve expenses, he had $1200 of his own filters shipped here for $50.

Back at Paul's place Doug recalled the making of his first feature film. It was about a guy who sang soprano and had a bunch of his performance art friends dancing in this gallery space. There was this wealthy woman who got turned off to the rich life and one day saw this older woman scrounging around in dumpsters and discovered that this woman was her mother. Doug said it was totally incoherent and the guy who's idea it was kind of stole the film stock and the camera to make it and then went to get the film developed and could not pay. They screened it for him but would not let him have it. Finally they just gave it to him because they realized that the only way they were going to get paid was to let him show it and try to raise money. I asked if it was ever in any film festivals or anything and Doug snorted, giving me a look that said "yeah, right" and told me no, it was never publicly screened.

Paul's door buzzer suddenly rings. It is Jeff Beard, one of the producers, coming to pick up Doug and drive him to Michel's, one of the co-producers, where he will be staying for the next few days. He hands Paul a contract and he signs it, almost offhandedly. Jeff is tall and red headed, with a short red beard and a baseball cap. He looks like he used to play sports when he was younger. Jeff saw William's fish-creature that he modeled after Paul's description of the fish-like aliens in the film, and was amazed. He wants to hook William up with people he knows who may need that kind of creature art.

In the middle of the night I fill William in about my time in Laguna Niguel, which he felt left out of. He also expressed concern that he can't eat his particular diet easily or spend less than $10 a meal. I tell him I don't want to eat expensive meals every day either and we'll work it out. In the morning, William, who has always been an early riser, goes to Erewhon, a chic natural foods store in Beverly Hills, with his sketchbook. He is gone when I get up and I take a shower and dry off with the last towel taken from the ritzy Mondrian Hotel by Paul and his friend Lee.

I get busy going to the post office and running errands. I mail a $10,000 check for the deposit on the house in Laguna Niguel (returnable pending no problems) along with my own rent check for March and bought two books of stamps. The line was surprisingly long and slow for 11 am on a Tuesday.

Paul has a meeting scheduled with Amber Conroy, the Sound Mixer, who arrives with a boisterous welcome at 1 pm. Jeff Beard arrives shortly after and hands Paul a contract, which he signs and hands back without missing a beat. Amber is young, in her twenties, extroverted and trendy with highlighted sandy blond hair pulled back away from her slightly freckled face and black accessories on that look like gloves with the fingers cut off that extend halfway up her forearms. She wears a red and black t-shirt with "Atomic" written on the front, a studded belt, jeans, and black boots, and has a speaking voice reminiscent of Janis Joplin. They discuss her television and film background and discover that she does both boom and mike, and Paul reinforces that he needs a lot of tight shots worked with as well as wide master shots.

"Let's say I want a situation where there's a mike, do you have a wire?"

"No, my roommate has wire...I have a $1500 mike and if it's close up you get a warm deep sound."

"I actually don't like when the sound is so clear and sharp in some cases," Paul says.

"Well, I can muffle it, whatever you want, no problem. You don't want to use wires like in a church, you want to hear that wide booming sound."

Paul sits up with a jolt, "Exactly!" He seems pleased and asks about tricky shots outside with background noise. "What about exteriors by a waterfall, for example."

"You're going to hear it over the dialogue. My number one concern is that all your outside stuff is *getting* noise in the background. I've done four films out in Griffith Park now. We'll try putting a grip truck in front of the running water to cushion the sound."

"The good part is that the house in Laguna Niguel that's in the first part of the shoot is super quiet..."

They continue to discuss sound related details, and then there is another of those synchronistic events that magically appears around the swirling vortex that is the film. "My father runs a product placement service that can supply free products in exchange for them being shown in the film. He can get all you want...water, catering...for free. He told me to mention him to you..."

"There's your Crafty," Paul leans over and whispers to Jeff.

"...All they want is, like, in the last film he did the lead actor has these sunglasses on for two seconds. He did *Mission Impossible 3*. Also, I can get a script breakdown."

"So what do we need that we don't have?" Jeff interjects.

"Water, sodas, Crafty stuff..." Paul rattles off a short list.

"Yes, get us a script breakdown."

"Okay, onward, here's the shooting schedule."

"So Gina's living room and Jennifer's bedroom are in the same house?" Amber asks.

"Yes," Paul replies, "but it'll be easy though."

"It helps my boom op to have the script because if the dialogue moves really fast I'd rather drop off the last word to get the first word."

"Good."

"If you want to wire a bikini it's better to have a strap bikini so that the mike can be right here (she indicates between her breasts). I'm confident in doing that kind of stuff."

All three of them glance over the schedule.

"We have them talking when water is spraying way up in the air."

"You don't have to have the water if you're re-shooting it from two different angles?"

"No."

"Good, we'll do it without the water."

"So your boyfriend or husband is a composer?" Jeff asks Amber.

"Boyfriend now, someday he'll be a husband," Amber smiles. "Yes, he does a lot of stuff Angelo Badalamenti style."

Paul shoots her an energetic thumbs up. "Yes! *Fire Walk With Me* is one of my favorite films!"

"I'll try and get you as much post stuff as I can."

The conversation becomes rapid-fire professional talk.

"Day five, Sunday, is a lot of lighting, Amber."

"Yeah, it's just a basic big dialogue scene."

"Will we hear the traffic on Flying Cloud from Pete's backyard?"

"I think we'll hear it a little bit."

"Do you pack up your equipment every night?"

"I can leave it or pack it up and take it with me."

"You can leave it if someone's sleeping in the house."

"Or leave it in the garage."

"I don't have a battery kit for my pack. I can rent it but I'd prefer not to do it for the whole shoot."

"Okay, awesome, thanks so much."

"How does it go from DAT to Final Cut Pro?"

"I've done DAT transfers, I have machines. But I need to find someone to fix them cheaper than $90 per hour...The car scene that has dialogue in it is the only day I need a battery kit...Jennifer and Gina in the car talking..."

"I'll talk to Frank," Jeff says.

"I'll pick up the expendables and bring you a receipt," Amber offers.

"We don't have the sleeping arrangements worked out yet, but--"

Amber snaps to attention at this and immediately responds, "Oh, by the way, I need my own space. I don't do the sharing a room with five people deal. I've done that before, it's too crazy. Even if I have just my own corner, really, as long as I have my own space. The AD is always the last person I want to share a room with. I'm sorry I'm really weird about personal space..." Amber rambled on in a bit of a tirade. "But you guys really have it together, I'm really impressed. You have it together better than a lot of the bigger budget stuff."

Amber shook hands all around and whirled out the door, followed shortly after by Jeff.

"That sound girl was really a trip, huh, such a strong personality," Paul said to me after they had gone.

The door buzzer sounds again almost instantly and I press the button to let them in. It is Samantha, the lead actress who plays Gina, followed by Trevor, the actor who plays Stefan, a few minutes later, at about 2:20. Samantha and William are supposed to rehearse at 4:30 but Samantha has an audition at 3:00 so the rehearsal is postponed.

Samantha walks in wearing a white t-shirt with Janis Joplin on it and jeans. *That's weird,* I thought, *everybody reminds me somehow of Janis Joplin*. She is slim and shapely and maybe about five foot two. Her hair is bleached blond and past shoulder length with the bangs long enough to be tucked behind the ears, gradually tapering down to the full length of her hair. Her

eyes are striking green, large and captivating, with beautiful long lashes, a button nose, creamy, fair porcelain skin and round face, and light pink lipstick.

Trevor is very tall, maybe six foot four, curly brown hair, in a white long sleeve t-shirt and jeans. He wears a bracelet with religious images on diamond-shaped wooden beads interspersed with roundish wooden beads strung on elastic band.

"You must be Maria," Samantha greets me.

"You must be Samantha," I stand up and hug her. "So nice to meet you!"

They run through the scene where they gaze at Mars together first sitting down and then standing up. They agree that standing up is, as Samantha says, "More what it would be." They have to try these different positions because Trevor is more than a foot taller than Samantha and they have to figure out a way of playing the scene that doesn't feel awkward.

Paul kneels down on one knee and watches intently, getting into the emotions which subtly show on his face, but also professionally evaluating what happens and giving specific instructions on what he wants to see.

"I want you to feel it internally then say it to her," Paul instructs Trevor. "It works better without the kiss. It's really intimate and great and the kiss somehow takes it away."

"Okay."

"Let's try it again."

Paul liked the last take and asked the actors what they thought. Paul has the script in front of him and flips through the pages after he's happy with the scene. I have never seen a rehearsal up close like this before and sit nearby, quietly and out of the way.

"Okay, scene 68," Paul directs.

"Do you want me really engaged?"

"Yes, whatever's in front of you is what you're engaged in ... We're going to cut two lines—'Either I succeed or I fail, but I can't stop it. Nothing can stop it,' and 'And if you fail?' Because you're focused on what's happening--Jennifer's dead."

"That feels, like, so much clearer to me in my head," Samantha says. Then they walk through the scene when Stefan tells Gina that Jennifer is dead. It was amazing to watch, the emotions that it evoked in me, just a snippet of a scene, out of context in thin air.

"Don't make it so personal with Stefan at the end," Paul referred to her pushing him away with a pained look as if he did something she was reacting to. "I think it will play really interesting. You don't usually see things like that."

Both actors ask Paul questions about how Gina is leaving and how Stefan feels about her leaving.

"So, it's not personal," Trevor says.

"Yes, it's just her following her calling." Paul feels that what he has been trying to communicate has been received.

"That's one of the things I love about Gina," Samantha says.

Paul favors something higher than personal relationship dynamics, often dysfunctionally portrayed in films, and wants the theme of emerging spiritual consciousness to be dominant.

Samantha leaves in a bubbly rush for her audition and after she has gone, Trevor has questions about Samantha's character, Gina, that Samantha shouldn't know. Samantha sees Gina as a Pisces, she's a little bit punkish and is "all over the place," meaning she has a strong, erratic energy, more than she can contain.

"How old is Stefan?" Trevor asks.

"Nineteen."

"And she's seventeen?"

"Yes."

"Has she had sex before?"

"No…maybe with one other person."

"Where are her parents?"

"On vacation."

Paul notices Trevor's bracelet.

"What's on that, is it saints?"

"Yes, there's St. Theresa, and there's Jesus..."

It belonged to a friend of his and after he got a part with Kevin Costner he gave it to Trevor as a good luck blessing.

Now Paul has received a call saying that the Homeowner's Association wants a fee to heat the pool, plus insurance. They must think the film has a huge budget, as many people do

when you mention the film industry. The film can't afford this and might have to go with whatever pool is cold. I think, *God, how frustrating!* Everybody is trying to serve their own interests to the point where the whole arrangement becomes impossible because they're asking too much. The refundable deposit on the house is a ridiculously large chunk of the production money. *If they only knew! Not everybody has a million bucks or is trying to make a million bucks. Remember art? Gaugin living in a hut in Tahiti fueling up on absinthe and unleashing the wonders of his mind's eye? David Lynch illegally living in the warehouse in which his film is being shot, stalled due to lack of funds?*

Paul arranges his couch in the middle of the floor at his own self-determined precise distance from his fifty-inch high definition television set, which takes up a good part of one wall. He adjusts it, moving it a couple inches closer, then sitting down, then moving it a couple inches back, until he is satisfied. He draws the blinds and arranges the squares of black velvet he has nailed over them and shuts out the light. Paul then puts on a scene from *The Exorcist* that is similar to the scene where Gina finds out that Jennifer is dead. He is showing Doug the feeling he wants to portray.

He is interrupted by a call from Jeff Beard about the pool. He is on the phone almost constantly while he eats some pasta I warmed up for him.

William and I would like to have a night out together before production and we scheduled that for Thursday night. Tomorrow night, Wednesday, William is rehearsing with Samantha and there are all kinds of wardrobe meetings. Among the many phone calls I learn that the financers for *Something Happened*, the larger budget film that Paul has been putting together with Richard Gere attached to star, are not moving on it and are afraid to tell Bryan Singer "no."

Well, what can be said about *Something Happened*? It is a novel by Joseph Heller that takes the *Catch 22* critical eye into the corporate world. Paul bought the rights to adapt *Something Happened* into a screenplay before Joseph Heller died, and has been putting together the film for the past seven or eight years. He had attached Tim Robbins to star at one point, but Tim backed out when his own son, about the same age as the son in the screenplay, started having similar problems. Richard Gere is now attached to star, but no solid monetary offer has been made yet. Apparently, they have some of the money, and Bryan Singer, who is producing the film, is in the role of bringing in more. Bryan is enthusiastic about the subject matter and

wants to support the film, but is always getting sidetracked by other, more profitable projects, such as *Superman Returns* and *House*, the television series. *Something Happened* has felt close to happening, or at least close to making a big push forward, at least twenty times in the past seven years. There is no straight line to making a larger budget movie, just a bunch of twists and turns, sometimes a big leap forward that reverses itself. Neither Paul nor I have given up on it, it just is and Paul looks at the next step and sees what needs to be done and does it to the best of his ability no matter what. Even if Paul has just lost a lead actor, he begins to do what he needs to do all over again to attach another. The financers that are working with Bryan Singer don't want to make any wrong moves with him because he brings in a lot of money, so they have to play him in order to keep the money flowing.

Paul describes this "playing" process over the phone during the search for financers for *Something Happened* when Tim Robbins was still attached as lead: "Bryan talked with the president of Fox Searchlight last week and did everything but get down on his knees and beg, which makes it look like nobody wants to do the movie, which isn't the case, but it's tough to get financers to say yes...Meg Ryan is reading it...Meg Ryan expressed that working with Tim Robbins is a plus...Bryan says to him, we have a ten year relationship, this is the one thing I'm passionate about, I did everything apart from getting on my knees and begging, which I would do for this project, Bryan said that, which is amazing...it's a great script, read it again, meet with Paul again if you need to, meet with me, what do we need to do to get this moving? We need to get this moving because you know it's castable, you know it's brilliant...let's move forward.

"Everyone's tendency is to not say yes or no and to maybe hope someone else does it and then if it's a big success they don't lose the relationship with the person, with Bryan. 'Cause that's a dangerous situation, to fuck up their relationship with Bryan. So if Searchlight says no, someone else does it and it's a huge success just as Bryan obviously laid out to him that it was, Bryan would let that affect his relationship with Fox Searchlight, he wouldn't go back to them because of that...And Searchlight knows it...Now if it's a huge success and they don't say no or yes they can say, Bryan, we would have done that movie...They can always pull that crap, and they will. So Searchlight said...and this is brilliant... Bryan goes, so finally when I was pushing, pushing, pushing them they realized that I had boxed them into a corner and they said ok, what you need from me, and soon, is a yes or a no, and Bryan says no, I don't, I need a *yes* from you." Paul grins and looks incredulous. "That's amazing. That's amazing..."

Paul pauses in admiration and then continues, “That’s what he’s out there doing. Screaming, in a passionately loving way of excitement about this project at the presidents of all the huge studios and companies and agencies in town...Because he’s been down this road before, he was down this road with *Usual Suspects*, he had to fight and crawl and scratch and scream to get that thing made and it wasn’t easy even with that cast. And now he’s down this road again except he’s in a much better position and it’s just as hard, but it’s a much harder industry now and it was tough then, that was 1993. He’s going to foreign financers, even the ones that passed on *Usual Suspects*, all these places passed on *Usual Suspects*.

“So Bryan said why don’t we just move forward. You can even move forward and not commit. I wouldn’t even let us say that we could move ‘phantom forward.’ Meaning we’ll say that Fox is involved just to use a name, but if you’re not really interested down the line once we get the cast together then I’ll let you say no and drop it. Which would suck for us, which means that we’ll have to find someone else to step in and finance it with the cast we’ve gathered. But the problem is we can’t gather the cast as easily and effectively without Fox. So move ‘phantom forward’ means put the money forward to Tim, lock him in and lock his agents in. Then off Tim make money offers to other actors. That’s what he’s trying to say. And then get this cast together and then that means that Fox has a say in the cast. The reason being that we both want the same people anyway. I want Meg Ryan, Fox is happy with that. Then when we get the cast all gathered you can drop it if you don’t want to do it. Rena is now into it, which is good for us. Of course we want Fox. They said they're going to really consider it. They're going to have to come back with a yes or a no next week.”

Paul remembers with *Freak* that people said congratulations when it was made, why didn’t you come to me, but he had. It’s such a Hollywood thing to just ignore the obvious facts. “Why didn’t you come to me? You come to me with your next one...We had a six hour conversation and you said no seven million times to me.”

Yes...that is the something that has been happening. That is Hollywood. Paul’s bright blue eyes see all this but his soul does not let it corrode its purity and love of art.

Paul's soul is revealed in a flashback to his first trip to Disneyworld in Florida, when, as a totally enraptured child, he beheld the Disney Light Parade, which burned into his being and alchemically changed it, the lights and sounds and brilliantly decorative costumes floating by, just for him, just to tell him they exist and to call him deeply in his being, these images becoming

a truth serum, a destiny serum in his blood. He can still whiz back there to that place at the mere mention of it; he was never the same since. Today, he is a pass holder at Disneyland, and visits the setting of his vision quest often, the place where his walkabout took place, his coming-of-age in a consciousness that grew him into a film director. It is not that way for everybody, most who enter the film industry see the possibility of money and power as the driving force, but Paul was converted there in front of the Light Parade, his soul was touched, as with Tinkerbell's wand, and the image-making wizard he was to become was born.

Now the wizard, entrenched in the many non-wizardlike details of really making a film, was explaining to me the difficulties of having SAG (Screen Actor's Guild) actors in an ultra low budget film. He had checked several times with SAG and was told that the union actors had to be paid and the non-union ones didn't. Then he gets a call from Jimmy, one of the executive producers, saying that if the non-union cast is acting with the union cast then they all have to be paid. Paul can't afford to pay them, so he may be forced to re-cast four of his actors who are SAG, to avoid being obliged to pay the entire cast. Some of the SAG actors, who have money, have offered to refund Paul their pay. This way, Paul would not get in trouble with SAG because he had technically paid his union actors. They are his good friends who excitedly invited themselves to take the parts they were cast for just to be in this project of Paul's, pay wasn't even on their agenda.

"If you pay a SAG actor $100 per day and they pay you back, you are still paying out $145 because SAG automatically gets a $45 fee," Paul explains. "Then they pay taxes on that $100 anyway so you really have to allow for paying out $175 to get your $100 back."

Apparently, there is now a rule that SAG insurance somehow covers non-union actors when they are working with union ones, so everyone gets paid. So SAG actors are no longer free entities, they cannot make a film with their friend for no pay even if they wanted to. Rules designed to protect often have the paradoxical role of restriction of freedom. *If there are restrictions on smoking or guns and you do not speak out against them, even though you may take part in neither, you are saying no to a free choice, passively advocating bringing in outside forces to deploy some regulatory action on the lives of others. Eventually the prohibition will spread to something you do value, like privacy, freedom from surveillance, for example, and by that time the pattern of increasing restriction will already be irreversible because it has been integrated into the collective psyche by slow stages and is now experienced as acceptable by the*

majority. When you throw a frog in a pot of boiling water, it immediately jumps out. But if you put a frog in a pot of warm water and slowly heat it up by degrees, the frog will boil to death. Paul and I have both learned the danger of imposed regulations in our core, we look at each other with a deep knowing, and this is one of the building blocks that has defined the solidity and ease of our friendship.

Also, they now want $500 to shoot at the community pool. Paul says, "No. Then we won't shoot at the pool."

Decisions are made, put to rest, then unmade because of some unforeseen monkey wrench, over and over. When William agreed to fly down, his part was going to be shot. During the three weeks since we got our plane tickets, there was a chance that the shoot would be split into two halves, one half now and the second half, including William's part, after more money has come in. After he had arrived, he learned that his part was not going to be shot at all now. Being a non-actor who is self-employed making polyester resin energy tool and art pieces, he realized that he had made a risky month-long commitment for almost no pay and wouldn't even accomplish what he came here to do. And now Paul's production team had to look for another location with a pool. The film seems to take two steps forward and one step back. But, as Paul ultimately knows in his soul, one step forward is still forward.

After a production meeting that Paul, Steve and Doug attended, a group of us were going to meet at Luna Park, a chic restaurant on La Brea near Paul. Doug, Paul, William and I were already inside when I saw Steve and Victor through the glass door. A slow, dawning, extreme expression of ecstasy spread over my face and I bolted outside.

"My brother!" I jumped at Steve and squeezed him hard. "My other brother!" I jumped at Victor. They look groomed and happy, Victor in black pants and trendy, long-sleeved shirt with a soft, very long lavender patterned scarf around his neck.

They are getting married this September 3. Over dinner, we learned that Calvin Coolidge had given a land grant to Victor's grandfather for ten acres of land thirty or thirty-five miles north of Santa Fe, in Chimayo, New Mexico. Chimayo means "spark and rock," and then the fire is lit. The land was passed from Victor's grandfather through the family and on to him. No one has ever lived on it. They are getting married in a restaurant in town and will have a ritual land-blessing and union-blessing ceremony on the land which they invite all their friends to take

part in. William gives Steve and Victor a miniature painting entitled "Tree of Life" as a blessing for their new place.

When the food comes Paul has an authentic look of amazement on his face at the shapes. There is an artichoke and lettuce that looks like Moby Dick with radishes and dressing spilling over the sides. William and I order *frou frou* drinks and sip them pleasantly. Our budget does not allow a meal at these prices.

On their land, Victor and Steve had people come to see if they could dig a well on it. The men said if they hit water, then a house could be built on the land. Victor and Steve were on pins and needles the whole time and finally they did hit water, 520 feet down. They want to build a 1500 square foot house on it and, later on, a number of smaller structures. The smaller structures can have either a kitchen or a bathroom in them but not both or they will be considered additional residences. They both wear platinum rings; Steve's is maybe 5mm, thick and elegant, and Victor's is about 4.5mm with diamonds paved all around it.

William talked at length about the electromagnetic energy mitigation information that he gave the people who run the Chinese tonic bar at Erewhon and they, in turn, gave him an expensive elixir for $2. It kicked his chest cold out in two days. The man who runs the business is named Truth. With recognition sparking in his eyes, Victor says, "Brown hair? Yeah. He's cute."

"Truth is cute!" I pipe up, delighted by the phrase.

"Truth turns me on," Steve confesses.

"Do the elixirs taste good?" Doug asks, intrigued.

"No. But they don't taste bad," William replies.

"Your mom wrote a cook book?" Steve has heard about Doug's chef of a mother.

"*The Raw Gourmet*," Doug smiled.

Doug then told a story of sailing an 18 foot Lightning in a 40 knot breeze when it should have been in 20 knots maximum because a storm was coming in and when they hit the harbor the boat's sails were at a 45 degree angle and he was skidding trying not to crash into other boats. His eyes shone with life and a sense of being in his element. This was another facet of Doug, the sailboat racer. I find him to be a very interesting combination of characteristics. A daredevil with the capabilities of an accountant and the refinement of a fine chef.

Paul, his mind never straying far from the subject, began describing that he didn't feel like he wrote the script, it just came out of some deep place and it happened to have some meaning. He compares the "Burke's dead" scene in *The Exorcist* by William Friedkin to the "Jennifer's dead" scene in *Life on Mars*. Both display interesting emotional reactions and framing of the shot when the main character learns of the death.

Paul excuses himself to make a call to someone who might have located creature suits that they can modify and use for the alien scenes. Apparently Jesse Eisenberg is being shot the same day he arrives and the same day he leaves the L.A. area. Jesse has been nominated for the Independent Spirit Award for his role in *The Squid and the Whale*, and they are flying him in to attend the awards ceremony. He will shoot his role in *Life on Mars* during this period. Jesse has recently starred with Christina Ricci in the movie *Cursed*. If someone expresses recognition of this fact then Jesse says, wryly, "Oh, so you were the one who saw that."

After dinner we bid each other exaggerated farewells and plan to get together again. Paul drops William and I off and leaves to drive Doug to Michel's place, where he will be sleeping. William and I look at each other with sudden recognition that we were alone. I light a candle and we share a tender, intimate moment in each other's arms. We leave the lights down low and lay on our air mattresses and wait for Paul sleepily. The phone abruptly rings. It is Anna Lisa, a girlfriend of Paul's, who wants to drop something off for Paul. Paul comes home and is in the bathroom and the buzzer rings and I run down the hall in my pajamas and let her in. They go into Paul's bedroom and William and I go to sleep.

In the middle of the night, William wakes up and we talk, as is not unusual for us. I have a sniffle, and William is worried about me running around too much and being cold at night because Paul doesn't have enough blankets. William says he's seen Paul change over the past four years in becoming very driven to the point where William feels somewhat distant from him.

Earlier that night, as the three of us were approaching Paul's apartment, William commented on the stretch limo parked out front.

"God, what's this huge limo doing out here?"

"Well, it's better than that school bus that's usually there."

Paul then related a story of an ocelot-breeding Rastafarian with a red school bus that always parked near his building and how he kept trying to get people to sign petitions to change parking rules and other neighborhood regulations. He's also tried to rally others to get involved

by stockpiling canned food and water for the Y2K apocalypse. Once Paul found him sleeping outside on the apartment steps after an earthquake. He said he was doing it so that the building wouldn't cave in on him during the aftershocks. Paul sees him as trying to get everyone on the "red tape wagon." William expressed his views that political activism in trying to have rents regulated is a way to preserve affordable housing. Paul said he would rather pay the extra rent, since his building wasn't rent controlled as long as the repairs were kept up, than waste time fighting it when he could be making a movie. William says that's great if you have the money, but without some legislation the people at the bottom will only become more oppressed.

Our nighttime conversation gradually melted into dream images of me running around a large building and looking in rooms and being late for a shoot. Earlier today Paul had given me a marble that he found and asked, "Is this marble yellow or is it green?" I examined it closely. "If I have to pick, I think it's green." Paul said, "Really? I think it's yellow." Now, in my dream, this marble began to get kind of squished and was actually some kind of candy. I awoke, bleary, and the images began to fade. It was morning. Paul was standing above us.

"It's cold in here. You didn't turn the heat up?"

We are getting the laundry together and Paul is telling me that Bryan is really focused on *Something Happened* as one of his next couple big projects. He is also turning towards *Logan's Run*, the script Paul and his writing partner Ethan Gross wrote with Bryan with the intent of Bryan directing the remake soon. The commencement of the production of *Logan's Run* would be good financial news for Paul.

"When the idea of *Something Happened* first began to take shape, Bryan had only made one blockbuster, *X-Men*, and the success of that could have been considered a fluke by wealthy Hollywood investors. Now he has made several profitable films and he's also conquered TV. *House* is a huge success, so with him backing *Something Happened*, it is much more likely to come through."

Teo comes over while I'm in the shower and shows Paul a bunch of pictures and discusses furniture and props with him. Paul leaves for about 45 minutes to check out options Teo has found for the plant that Gina transforms with elixir in the film.

William comes back when I'm down in the laundry room. He has brought a Chinese tonic back for me in a paper bag and hurriedly puts the bag on the couch and goes into the

bathroom. The lid on the drink is not secure and a third of the liquid spills out during the time William is in the bathroom. I come up the stairs from the laundry room and William sees the brown creeping stain on the pillows and on two of his brand new shirts with the tags still on that he bought especially for this trip.

"This is such a disaster! I shouldn't try to do the things I know, there's never any time. You can drink the rest if you want, but it's half gone!" William laments.

We turn around to see Paul pulling out his video camera; its mechanical eye whips up at us. "Maria, what just happened here?"

I am a little surprised, trying to thank William for thinking of me and my health and telling him it's all right, that I can get all the stains out, but I recover quickly.

"Well, William bought me this Chinese tonic and set it on top of his suitcase and it was just a taped top on a paper cup and it spilled out all over. And here it is..." I tilt the paper cup towards the camera and Paul pans in.

William by this time has his stained shirts in the sink and is running water over them and squirting dish soap on them.

"They'll never come out." He is still visibly upset.

"No, no, no. I'm doing laundry now. Give them to me. They're wet still. I can get the stains out." I drag them out of the sink and put them in a plastic bag and stick them in the washer. They come out totally fine, the pillows too.

People are in and out of the apartment all afternoon. Every time somebody comes to see Paul, they give him something to sign. Teo has transportation contracts for him when he comes back. There is a charged feeling in the air, a sense of tension, of anticipation, of excitement, a deep feeling of high stakes and lengthy preparation about to meet its moment of truth.

A couple days ago at Laguna Niguel, Paul was talking with Doug when his phone rang. After the conversation Paul says, "Oh, I just have to mention this. That was Scot Bagley and I just so clearly pictured my phone and his number right before it rang, it was weird, totally psychic."

And then, just now, Paul came in from walking around outside while he was talking on the phone. I went up to him, stopped, and looked him in the eyes in a connective, revelatory way.

"You know what? We're making a movie!" It had the feeling of this-is-finally-the-moment, as if it were the day of the Olympic competition after years of training. The moment of truth.

Paul looked at me blank for a second, then puzzled. "What? Did you just come up with that on your own?"

"What? What do you mean?"

"Jeff just wrote me an e-mail this morning saying exactly the same thing. It was at 8:00. You were still sleeping. He said that even though this is totally stressful, we're making a movie. If you want to make *Life on Mars*, this is how it is. If we had a bigger budget, the film we would be making would probably be totally average."

He stood there for a moment, silent, with open blue eyes. There was a sense of the future thick in the room, a vastness that would become rapidly filled with events totally out of our control. In that moment we were meeting those events, silently and internally, each showing the other a strength and solidarity in stance and gaze, a knowing, somehow, that it will be needed.

Trevor and Samantha have been rehearsing now for some time in Paul's living room, and I realize that I never get tired of watching rehearsals.

"So, what are you going to do on your last night?"

"Make love to you..."

There is a long pause between Trevor's and Samantha's lines, and many subtle facial expressions. It is as captivating to watch Paul watching the actors as it is watching the actors themselves. He stares intently at their expressions, almost disconcertingly, but they are absorbed in their roles and appear not to notice. Between takes Paul changes his position so he can watch the scene from different angles. I would have stayed there and watched forever but I had errands to run. I left them to their rehearsing and went to Staples, the copy place down the street, and Goodwill to make a donation for Paul. I came back to a wardrobe meeting, which had begun at 5:30. Paul was in the middle of planning Samantha's wardrobe when I walked in.

"No, I don't dress up," Samantha was saying. Martine is holding up a lingerie top and she does not feel that it is Gina. They decide on women's boxer shorts with red stripes for the scene where Gina dances in the garage as she is setting up her chemistry lab.

As they are planning her outdoor clothes, I say to Paul, "I have that blue hoodie." He has me pull it out of my suitcase, which is right there on the floor, and Samantha tries it on.

"No, too light. You look cool, but it's too light."

"What about the black hoodie?" I am wearing it and take it off and hand it to her. She tries it on and looks down. "Yeah," she says.

Martine jokes, "Why don't you take off all your clothes?" I pantomime that I do. Paul likes the black hoodie too.

Martine has suggestions for each scene and types away at her power book. Present at this time are William, Paul, Martine, who is in charge of costumes, Bridget, who is doing makeup, Samantha, Marina and me. Ailee and Jeff are here too but they seem to have been having their own meeting outside. They eventually return and join the group.

We move on to Jennifer's wardrobe. Both girls have brought a variety of clothes that they already own so Paul can decide what he likes for which scenes. Marina has brought several pairs of jeans and corduroys. Paul says, "The whole 'low' thing has been around for, like, two years now, and I don't really like it, I don't know why." He is referring to the low waist jeans which have been in style lately, and I tell him he probably doesn't like it because it doesn't accentuate the curves of a woman's hips, it cuts through the middle of them.

Bridget then begins to do Samantha's makeup in the corner by Paul's computer and Marina tries on clothes in the bedroom. Ailee begins discussing sleeping arrangements. Paul asks, "What is this mysterious hotel?" There is supposedly a hotel for $69.99 per night where you can sleep people on two queen size beds and a cot and an air mattress. Steve Sprung has a friend who has volunteered to sleep eight people at his house. Paul jokes, "I'd be happy to share a bed with whatever girl you want me to."

Ailee laughs. She has just spoken with the first assistant director. "You know, Seth just called and said exactly the same thing." William and I will be sleeping at the Laguna Niguel house that we will be shooting in.

After the costume work is done the conversation somehow turned to crystals, and Marina said that William and I need to go to Carlsbad, New Mexico. We showed Ailee a whole bunch of crystals that we had brought along. Ailee is also into Jung. Samantha said she found a book of Jack Kerouac's paintings that she was looking through to find posters for her room and one painting was of a blue globe. "The blue planet," she grins.

Bridget did Samantha's makeup and then Marina's. She was just there to show them how to do their own makeup on set because the budget wouldn't allow an on-set makeup artist. Samantha was starving and Ailee went to get her a low-carb chicken salad from Trader Joe's while I made Trader Joe's Thai soups for the five of us who wanted it. Stuff was strewn all over the floor, clothes spilling out of duffel bags and suitcases, and eventually everyone completed their jobs and left except for Samantha and Marina. Marina is thinner than she looks in her head shot, wearing a gray hoodie with fabric fragments sewn in a line down the front and sides, jeans and high-heeled light brown boots. Both Marina and Samantha are prettier than their headshots, but you would think it would be the opposite, that in the headshot the lighting and makeup would accentuate their beauty because it was all staged for maximum effect.

The four of us sat around and talked, William telling stories of the 1960's when he was sitting Zen in San Francisco and camping on hillsides where a commune of people lived in an area that was laid out just like a house--minus the roof and the walls. These reminiscences became a session of coil-showing and explanation. William showed some of his Crystal Coil Amplifiers which he sells as part of his living and which he is lending to Paul to use as props for the physics table of Gina's garage laboratory. Samantha and Marina were rapt and stayed until about 11 pm. A few of workers at the Chinese tonic bar said they would love to sell William's entire line of energy tools. They would talk to the owners of Erewhon, a local upscale natural foods store in Beverly Hills, and tell them it would compliment their service. William said he felt an internal shift in energy, an opening of possibility.

It was late when we finally got to bed but we both slept well and awoke feeling good. He said sweetly in my ear, "I have use for you," and we kissed each other tenderly and spent a moment holding each other close.

The morning then brought a bunch of household chores for me, taking out the trash, buying food, and writing postcards which I went to mail with Paul, who needed to make a photocopy of a tax form. I called my mom and dad while we were walking and my mom told me that she had received a note from Eryk, Andrew Harvey's ex-husband, which included an article about remedies for osteoporosis, with no return address on it. My Mom had been occasionally in touch with Eryk, and was upset that he did not leave an address where she could contact him to say thank you for his thoughtfulness. She had been so touched she cried. She asked about the food we bought at Trader Joe's with her gift money two or three times; she's probably had a

glass or two of wine as she sometimes does because it's 5:30pm now on the east coast and she'd be cooking or eating dinner.

Paul had spoken to Teo over the phone and suggested that William's knowledge of crystals might be useful to him. As William had once owned a cabinet making shop, he called Teo and offered to cut and shape the pieces himself if Teo would buy a specified Plexiglas sheet material and find a place for him to work. William assumed Teo had both a budget for this and a space to do the work. Teo said he didn't have a place to work and suggested William get the material himself. When William said he didn't have his own vehicle in LA, Teo said, "Then forget it, we'll take care of it ourselves." Paul, being informed of this, asked William to persevere in offering his services, so William took a bus over to Teo's to offer his services in person. He expected to see a shop crammed into a garage or storage unit of some sort. He found Teo working out of his second story apartment and a reaction that was anything but receptive. As Teo had so much on his plate, William couldn't understand the rebuff. With no previous experience with working in the very competitive atmosphere of the movie industry, he had no idea that his offer of help could be misinterpreted as overstepping his bounds. To William, we were all there to support Paul in any way we could. But to Teo, it probably seemed like a novice actor was trying to tell an art director how to do his job. Paul said not to take it personally as Teo was under a lot of pressure and some mutual accommodation would be worked out.

Then William heard that Teo was considering using round rods of Plexiglas for the Crystal City in Gina's lab. He was afraid that the result would end up looking more like control rods than crystals. Teo told William at a production meeting not to worry as any final shape issues could be done on location at the Laguna Niguel house. But considering noise restrictions during filming and making a mess in an upscale retirement community where a few already resented our activities, this was not a viable option. Frustrated that he brought no tools of his own to work with, William busied himself making accurately shaped crystals out of Styrofoam with just an Exacto knife and rock-textured acrylic. Paul loved the shapes, but not their opaqueness. Paul suggested he bring them to the production meeting that night.

"If I'm rehearsing right before the shoot, I'm going to want it quiet, I can't have saws going in the background," Paul said emphatically.

Paul and William spent the rest of the day consulting on the design of the Crystal City.

William says, “When this thick, textured acrylic dries it won’t look so milky and the added garnet granules will give them a reflective surface. At least, this gives a truer model of what the crystals should look like. But if you want the transparent quality of quartz, Plexiglas is the only way to go.”

“That was the original idea,” Paul agrees.

“If that’s the case, you’ve got to go with thick Plexiglas sheet cut with 60° bevels and glued together,” William advises.

“Hmm,” Paul said. “I guess it shouldn’t be that hard.”

We are now leaving to go to Erewhon. William mills around the apartment, gathering his keys and wallet and jacket. “Got this, got this, got that...” he mutters to himself.

“You always say that,” I tease. "Got this, got that, got this, got that..."

“At least I didn’t say, ‘here’s the story...’” He grins wide and mischievously.

Paul receives a call from Jack Kulp who said he mailed the check today. He has never invested in the arts before, and he is contributing a badly needed $10,000. It feels like, wow, we're saved. Instead of $39,000, we now have $49,000. Big difference.

On the heels of this news, the three of us go to Erewhon so Paul can drop William and I off and come and pick us up in an hour. Paul takes his car out of his friend Stas’ garage, where he occasionally has to park because there is often no available parking space within a few blocks of his apartment. He pays $1,050 per month in rent, and no parking spot. And a view of a parking lot, which he can’t use, out of his living room window.

So we drive to Erewhon, which is only a couple miles away, and at the Chinese tonic bar I meet Randy, a tall, thin young man, maybe in his late twenties with curly dark brown hair, almost elongated hexagonal glasses with thin, dark metal frames, wearing a black pullover and a bracelet of light brown wooden mala prayer beads.

“Randy, this is Maria, your absentee client,” William cordially introduces me.

“Hello, Randy, nice to meet you. Your drink helped me, it gave me a kind of buzz though, not a jittery one, just a pleasant wakefulness.”

“I feel great,” William says.

Randy listens to my pre-production rushing rap with patient awareness and replies, “I’m going to make you two different drinks.” He turns to me and says, “Yours is a yin-balancer, even stronger than the one I made before.”

He starts pulling out herbs in capsules from different bottles and puts them into a little disposable plastic cup that salad dressing often comes in when you buy a ready-made salad. He then puts a cup of clear, yellowish liquid into a blender, which might be tea, and begins opening each capsule in the little plastic container one by one and pouring its contents into the liquid, discarding the shells. Then he starts selecting bottles of tinctures and squirting dropper-fulls into the mixture. This is all happening very fast, a series of sure, clear decisions evoking a wise healer conjuring up an alchemical healing tonic, which is what it was. The procedure had a sense of ancient knowledge about it, like it could have been happening thousand years ago, in some royal apothecary in the Forbidden City, minus the blender, of course, and minus Beverly Hills.

Randy mixes William’s drink first and then mine. I sip mine, with a degree of mindfulness. It is bitter with a silty graininess and sweet licorice overtones. Its warm and dark brown liquid tastes very herbal and healthy. I sit there, quiet and content with my drink while William speaks a little about his energy tools to Randy and Truth, the long-haired, clear-eyed manager of the tonic bar wearing a Tibetan-looking maroon, long-sleeved top with elongated wooden cylindrical beads for buttons. Truth is very knowledgeable about healthy living in general, not just Chinese healing herbs. Sarah, also working the tonic bar and listening to the conversation, buys one of William’s Mμ-Ankh pendants, and Randy buys two. We get a salad and two loaves of rice bread and medicinal honey and race off to a production meeting at Jeff’s house.

Jeff 's house is a pleasant little one-bedroom bungalow with hardwood floors and good outside light. The walls in the living room where the meeting is taking place are pale blue, and there is a sense of open space beyond the room’s actual size. There is a small, trendy production desk in the corner where Jeff sits in khaki shorts, black pullover, red baseball cap and black flip flop sandals. He has come down with a cold from all the pre-production work and stress. A cute fourteen month-old, short-haired black cat named Skinny has stolen Doug’s chair.

Different conferences immediately begin taking place as people are still arriving. Doug and Paul, William and Teo, Jeff and Mike, with Ailee passing out revised versions of the

shooting schedule. It is a big hubbub. People start to settle down for the general meeting. Teo pulls out a glass bulb that is connected to a smaller glass bulb by a curly glass straw, and when you hold the bottom bulb, the heat of your hand makes the red liquid in it travel up the curly glass tube into the top bulb and bubble. He grins as the object catches Paul's attention.

"Wow, this is great. How many do we have of these?" Paul goes over to examine it.

"Three."

"Gina can hold one in her hand or something."

Doug picks it up and nothing happens.

"You're not very hot," Paul says, amused.

"You're cold-blooded, Doug," Teo jokes.

There are ten people here now: Jeff, Michel, who is a co-producer, Teo, William, me, Paul, Doug, Mike the scripty, Ailee the production coordinator, and Chris, another co-producer.

Michel says, "Why don't you sit down?" gesturing to Mike to take the remaining chair.

"Thank you, I'm ok."

"I'm used to the floor, I'm a yoga teacher," Michel informs him as he sits down on the floor and begins limber stretching exercises.

Binders open everywhere, there are portable coffee cups and attaché cases strewn on the floor.

Seth, the assistant director, walks in. Skinny the cat is nowhere to be seen. Teo has a t-shirt on that says, "What is Funny? -- A short film by Teo Guardino."

"All right, everyone, hello," Jeff begins, raising his voice for attention. "I'm a little sick, I apologize, thank you for keeping your three foot radius...Especially you," he points to Paul, "especially department heads."

We all consult the schedule that Ailee has handed out.

"All right," Doug is saying, "Let's take a look at the schedule, Day 1. I'm predicting it will take five hours to shoot 35." He is referring to scene number 35.

"Question," Teo pipes up. "Are they going to just be rollerblading or riding bicycles too."

"Riding bicycles."

"Okay, got it."

"How many bicycles do we have?" Paul asks.

"I have several but they're all different sizes," Teo informs him.

"You know there's one in the garage," Seth says.

Michel is coordinating transportation and needs to know about how long each shot will take. Seth gives him information.

"Anybody know anybody with a cool convertible that we can borrow?" Jeff poses to the group.

Mike knows someone with a silver convertible, Michel knows someone with a dark green-blue one. Paul says silver is probably better. Ailee says she has access to a '97-'98 blue convertible. Jeff says, hands cupped, "Send all cars to me tomorrow morning!"

We move to discussing issues on Day 2 of the shoot. Scene 88A, shot 1 and Scene 1, shot 1 are not supposed to be the same place and Doug wants that clearly distinguished on film. Teo, who has been leaning out of his chair and rooting around under it, captures Skinny and knocks over a sculpture of a giraffe, which clatters loudly on its side. He picks up the sculpture self-consciously and his notebooks fall off his lap. "It's not working," he says, a little sheepishly to the eyes that are on him and his noisy interlude. Skinny darts away.

"If you have any filters, you should bring them," Doug resumes.

"Unfortunately, I don't," Mike answers.

"Okay…what about the pudding. Jennifer eats pudding, what have we got here?"

"I found strawberry and chocolate pudding but no butterscotch," Teo confesses.

"Is it pink?" Paul asks.

"It's pink with white swirls."

"It's swirly, oh."

"Has anyone asked Marina what she likes because we're going to make her eat an ungodly amount of the stuff," Doug declares. There are giggles from around the room.

"She can spit it out," Paul says.

"I have a question. How many packs should I get?" Teo asks.

"Twelve would make me feel like we have enough."

I look up, astonished.

"They come in sixes, should I get eighteen?" Teo makes a note, not missing a beat.

"Yeah, that's good. Get a bunch because Mark is going to eat it too."

The discussion then turns to the magazines that Gina will be ripping up in her bedroom while talking to Jennifer. Some comic books are really expensive, but Paul doesn't care what they are; only that the colorful cartoonish images can be glimpsed while she's tearing them. I look around and think how much I enjoy seeing so many people discussing every detail of Paul's vision so seriously.

The next topic is the posters on Jennifer's wall that she stares at after drinking Gina's elixir.

"The ideal for me is that there's a beach and you can see the water and a palm tree and a girl standing holding a beer," Paul starts describing the image he has in his head. "Like even an ad in a travel magazine that says, 'Take a vacation in Jamaica,' or whatever."

From time to time, the room breaks up into many high-energy discussions all happening at once. While one of these is going on, Ailee finds a beautiful picture of a beach and palm tree on the internet and shows it to Paul. She asks him if he wants her to e-mail him the photographer's name. He says yes.

"By the way, we are going to get a permit," Jeff announces through the din. " For the fire hydrant accident scenes. Sunday. Who's going to be up at 7:00 am on a Sunday, right?" A clap is heard from here and there among the group. You can't just film in the street, you have to pay for a permit to do so, especially if you are going to stage an accident which involves the simulation of a broken fire hydrant spurting water all over the area.

"What if it goes longer?"

"Maybe we can forge the permit," Michel plots, half seriously.

"Forge a legal document? That's a felony!" Jeff is ultimately responsible for all of the elements of production, and seems quite perturbed at the notion that jail may be one of those elements.

"Does anybody know a cop? That's the ultimate," Paul grins.

"Obviously, none of this ever happened, right?" Jeff steps in to close the discussion. I grin to myself, the rag-tag renegade truth of this whole low budget production thing in contrast to the general public's impression of Hollywood more than a little bit ironic. We move on to the details of the car race and fire hydrant crash scenes.

"William and Maria are going to be in safety vests, directing traffic."

"There should be no problem now that we got rid of that busy street shot," I explain. "The rest of the scenes are no problem."

"You're obviously on your way to production management," Jeff commends me, then turns to Paul, who is saying, "We're going to shoot slowly and run it quickly," in regards to the car race scenes.

The next topic is the Tesla coils that have been proposed for Gina's lab. Ailee, quietly at her computer, finds a Tesla coil rental place on the internet. There is a picture of one sparking electricity everywhere and another that is ten feet tall.

William says, "Tesla is one of my patron saints. I knew a physics dropout from the University of Colorado who made one that was so big and powerful that when he fired it up it left burn marks on his concrete driveway. He would say, 'Don't worry, it won't hurt you in this dry environment, unless you're wearing rubber soled shoes, or, uh, maybe that's leather, I can't remember.' "

There is some talk about the expensive Tesla coil rentals and also that everyone has seen them before, and the possibility of William's TetraShield being used in its place is proposed. The TetraShield that William manufactures is a resin, copper and crystal tower over three feet tall, with three copper tubes of different lengths protruding from a resin base and linked by two copper plates. It looks powerful and mysterious, and totally unique.

Michel has already turned to transportation concerns. "When we shoot scene 68, that is Jesse's last day. It's also Trevor's last day. Maybe we can get them both to the airport in one trip.

"Not really," Seth says, "because it will bump Jesse down." Seth tries to time out how long each scene will take.

"Teo needs a huge amount of time between scene 21 and scene 36," Doug says.

"That's on a different day," Teo looks up, confused.

"Well, listen, the way it sits now we shoot scene 68 at 4:00, is Jesse cool to hang out between 2:00 and 4:00?" Seth asks.

It is determined that he is, and the next topic is addressed.

"Scene 65, what is happening?"

"You can take baking soda and a little vinegar and it foams up," William is making suggestions about how to create bubbles and other chemistry-lab looking action.

"You can add whatever colored liquid you want," Teo contributes.

"No," Paul says.

"You don't want foam?" William asks.

"No, the foam would be awesome, I just want the liquid to be clear."

"We're at the heated pool, right?" Jeff is trying to get a handle on all the conversations happening at once.

"No."

"But they're heating the other one. We're at the farther one, not the one across the street," Paul explains. "I told Marina we'd have all kinds of heating stuff on her. The heated pool is good but she'll still be cold when she gets out."

"Okay," Jeff vies again for the attention of the group. "I think we're done." The cohesion of the meeting was starting to break up.

I approached Jeff about directing traffic, and we determined the car chase and crash scenes where it was necessary.

"Can you coordinate that?"

"Yeah, no problem, we got rid of the scene where Gina and Stefan were gazing at Mars on Flying Cloud in the dark, which is winding and busy, and that was the biggest risk, I think. I've had a summer job in college as a flagger before. As far as I can see, the rest is no problem, traffic is slow and sparse."

"And we have a permit."

"Yeah, it shouldn't be a problem."

"So, you can coordinate it? It helps me so much not to have to plan everything. Thanks." Jeff high-fives me.

Before we leave, Jeff asks William why he's here. "Your scenes won't be shot until the second part of the shoot and we don't know when that will be." William hides his surprise and says, "I'm just here to support Paul and Maria any way I can." Both shake hands a bit puzzled by the other's comments.

Back in the car Paul whips out a CD with a flair and we listen to music from the movie *J'Taime Me Non Plus*. I have noticed that Paul inserts inspirational moments whenever he can, to keep his creative juices flowing during these busy, heavily production-oriented times.

At Taco Bell William tells Paul that Teo now wants to use clear Plexiglas square rods to make the crystals. Though Teo says his reluctance to utilizing William's skills is the lack of transportation, William is now feeling a distinct competitiveness. Teo is the head of the art department and does not have a car! On these low budget films everyone is always jockeying for credits, because pay is minimal, or even nonexistent, and credits can help build their resume and acquire additional jobs. Trying to assuage him, William tells Teo he has no intention of carving out a career in Hollywood. He thinks that that confession should ease the situation, except it doesn't because it either makes no sense to film industry insiders or is construed to be an outright lie. It is like saying you're enrolled in college but you're not interested in getting a degree.

Paul was a little annoyed. "It should be obvious, that's labor," he said, meaning that William would best be put to use on labor-intensive projects. William has both the skill and experience to insure the shapes made out of Plexiglas will replicate quartz crystal. Teo feels clear square rods will do and brushes off William's offer to help. It probably doesn't help that William is the director's sister's boyfriend. Or that he is an outsider. Or that he is an accomplished artist asked by Paul to create half a dozen paintings with alchemical themes specifically related to the film. Teo continues to say the final shaping can be done on site in Laguna Niguel with a belt sander. Paul suggests using Steve and Victor's yard. William knows that's even problematic because he's worked a lot with Plexiglas making store fixtures and knows what a mess it will make.

"It's obvious Teo doesn't want me working on this," William explains to Paul. "My biggest fear is that we have even less tools and supplies down there than we do here."

"Well, some of the props for the lab are already made."

"No one's seen the TetraShield except Samantha and Marina."

"And they ate it up," Paul grins at William.

At home Paul showed me a few scenes from the movie *Ponette*. It is about a bunch of four-year olds dealing with big life issues, like death and God. The lead little girl won best actress, not best child actress, but best actress for her role.

"You want the heat?" Paul asks, and turns it up. We all go to sleep. The next thing I know is that William is softly waking me up in the middle of the night. He can't sleep because he's thinking of Crystal City and fears Teo's square peg approach will win out. This is even

more disturbing for William as he treats crystals as if they are living entities. Our whole apartment is filled with them. We even sleep with crystals under our pillows!

"I don't care which way it's done, as long as the final result is true to the spirit of the crystal."

I told him to discuss this with Paul and see what he says. We both go back to sleep but William is up much earlier than me and working at Paul's kitchen table. I move to Paul's little dressing alcove where it is a little quieter and try to sleep a little more. When Paul gets up, William tells him his thoughts about Crystal City and Gina's lab.

"I fear the whole laboratory set is heading in a hokey direction. The Tesla Coil is like something out of Frankenstein. Everyone has seen that before. No one seems to understand that Gina's lab is alchemical and not like some wacky scientist in a third rate, B-movie. Alchemy can be divided into two paths– the Red Lion Path and the Green Lion Path. Both have the same goal. The Red Lion Path is also referred to as the Dry Path– the path of fire and chemistry. The Green Lion Path follows the older herbal ways of seeking to release the pure essence of plants through putrification– a form of mystical resurrection. Gina's lab has characteristics of both. Dry ice and colored liquids bubbling in flasks will make it look cheap, like California sci-fi. We should show her with mortar and pestle grinding herbs. Herbs can be dried in bundles and taken down from the rafters. I see her more like a modern witch empowered by an understanding of science."

William knows that Paul does not want a teen movie-looking lab set. Paul, from the beginning has discouraged bubbling liquids and the like during the production meetings. Paul likes William's suggestions very much.

"I feel that the lab is an area that hasn't yet really been created. What I have said so far is just a placeholder for me." So he expected a type of brainstorming session from production or at least from the art department.

William continues, "Teo now wants to take Plexiglas and make square crystals with rooftop points."

"No, I definitely don't want square crystals."

"They'll end up looking like control rods. I can make crystalline structures with shapes mimicking all the required angles. Also, our friend Dan the Rockman knows someone in Malibu and maybe he can loan us a whole bunch of crystals."

They discuss the details of calling Dan or of collecting all our crystals together.

"We can have a crucible lit subtly with red LED lights and its heat implied by Gina putting on gloves and using tongs. We need a refractory oven." William takes Paul's encouragement and runs with it, letting his vivid imagination loose.

"She takes crystals and uses them to awaken consciousness in plants, she then takes plants and makes them more human-like, and takes humans and makes them ...whatever..." Paul muses emphatically.

William suddenly embodies the poetry-quoting sage, as Ian is in the film, and recites a line from a Rumi poem: "When have I ever become less through dying?"

Paul gets Teo on the phone. "Hey, we have rethought the lab--in a good way..."

Paul had been taking notes while William was talking and now he sits, still in his pajamas, telling Teo about these changes. Just a moment ago he spoke to Ailee and cancelled the Tesla coil. Ailee's mom works with crystals and makes jewelry, and because of this Paul assumes a higher level of occult crystal understanding in her than, perhaps, in Teo. Paul holds the calcite crystal William gave him as he talks to Teo and examines it. It is white and maroon red, the matrix being an opaque white with the little and medium sized crystals protruding from it having a wine red hue. Paul called it a little world.

William tries to reach Dan Rokosz, the Rockman in Portland, Oregon, but is unable to. William then expresses his concern about the feeling of competition growing between him and Teo. Paul says that there's always competition in film production and not to worry about it. He confides that he has been having the same dynamic with Teo as William has.

"Teo's in competition with *me*. From our talk he knows the director won't accept square crystals. He has to adjust to it. See, his job is to put shit everywhere and take before and after shots and then he can show it and say, 'See, this is what I did.' He wanted to put all this clutter on shelves in the garage and I said, 'No, first of all we don't have the money for that, and second, I like the wall as it is and I'd rather spend money to make better crystals."

I spent the morning packing up William's TetraShield and other energy coils, calling around for crystal materials and a possible crystal loan. Samantha will be coming over at 1:00 pm for a rehearsal with William.

In the middle of all these *Life on Mars* preparations, Paul relays news that his financers, as well as Bryan Singer, are moving on the funds for *Something Happened*. Bryan has

announced that he is ready to make this one of his next couple big projects. Paul's lawyer has been going over minute details of the rep contract and Paul just wants to sign it and move on.

Samantha bustles in for rehearsal, all apologies. "Sorry I'm a few minutes late, I was on the phone with my brother, his wife is having a baby and they just found out it's a boy. They have a three year old, Olivia, and they're thinking of naming the baby Owen."

There is a little bit of social conversation as everyone settles in. Paul says he supports *The War of the Worlds* as a decent film, and that Tom Cruise killing Tim Robbins is a daring move. He likes that there is no plot of scientists trying to figure out what is happening, and that there is no fighting among human factions.

My cell phone rings. It is Ailee, who asks me to pick up snacks for the launch party. The budget is $25.

Rehearsal begins and is going well. Paul gives a thumbs-up to me sitting behind him while William is reciting the Goethe poem in German. He does it softly and intensely.

"To me, the hand-holding is her passing a responsibility on to me," William refers to Gina taking Ian's hand before he recites the poem.

They move on to the scene where Gina is angry outside Ian's tent. Paul requests of William, "Say that, 'Why do you think I have so much faith in you?' with a strong conviction."

They improv scene 71, adding background dialogue that could have theoretically arisen before the actual scripted lines took their final form. Paul watches with intelligent hawk-aware eyes for a while and then softly instructs, "Now move into the scene." The actors lead right into it.

"Gina, you're frustrated because you're not getting the answers you want," Paul says. "You want to be told that everything will be all right or you want Ian's ok to quit. Okay, start at scene 69, it's a different moment, improv and lead into the scene when you're ready."

Samantha takes notes with different colored pens on her copy of the script. William informs her, "You're up on the cross, is there a resurrection? There's no way that you become deified before the fact."

Paul picks up his guitar during a tangential discussion of films that are related to emotional tones in *Life on Mars* and starts strumming softly.

"In *A Clockwork Orange,* there's something about the beauty and the absurdity of it. He's being tortured and they're playing Beethoven, I'm all about that," Samantha says, with passion.

"Yeah, you really care about him."

"Ian is a culture jammer. Anyone who has been brought to the point where they want to tear this thing asunder, I'm here to support them. You can't go back, so where do you go if you can't go back?" William pauses.

"You have to rehearse a lot, it's absolutely essential because you can't just do it right. The process has to work itself out and you can't come to it unless you're fresh in the moment and not stuck in your mental conception of what you thought the moment would be."

Paul puts on a scene from the movie *Nashville.* Lily Tomlin sits alone at a table in a smoky bar, watching a young country singer play the guitar and sing. The scene is a couple of minutes of Lily Tomlin's subtle and surprisingly expressive body language as she listens and feels a range of emotions, including arousal, emotional thwarting pain and jaded weariness. "There's something she's been denying herself so much and it's so subtle but so well expressed. He's a womanizer, and she's in desperate need of something but doesn't know how to get it."

"You have to go all over the boards, there's no right way and if you don't reach far you miss something, then you evolve an understanding and begin to come from within that understanding," William is in a profound, clear state. He is still in character. "I have something to tell Gina. It's not didactic. It pours out of my heart. Time changes. It stops; expands. Once during the poem it felt timeless and then it slipped into slow motion. I'm caught up in your eyes. They are the portals through which my message must be poured."

"You can feel it in the body, if the connection is there you're both getting what you need, if it's not then you're not, you know?" Samantha engages vibrantly.

"There is a novel by Hermann Hesse called *Narcissus and Goldmund*. I identify with Goldmund," Paul explains, revealingly. "Narcissus is about spirituality but Goldmund is not about just spirituality but about being an artist. He goes and studies and then lives in nature and comes back and learns more discipline until he gets his masterpiece out which is a painting of his mother. And he dies young because you can't put yourself through that and not."

Chapter 5

Countdown to Launch

As I was walking through Trader Joe's gathering food for the launch party, I looked around wondering how many of these people are buying food for some aspect of film production. I had a certain hunch that I was not the only one. Paul and William had gone to get some art supplies. They did not find the styrofoam for the Crystal City that they were looking for.

The launch party at Paul's place was very high energy and friendly. Ailee and Martine had bought a cake and we hid in Paul's bedroom while Martine wrote in green frosting, "Go Get 'Em Todisco" on the cake. I put the candles on and we lit them and walked out.

"What should I say?" Martine whispered with urgency. By this time we were out in the crowd.

"Congratulations, Paul!" I shouted over the din. Paul turned abruptly, eyebrows raised in surprise, then his face melted into a brotherly smile. Everyone started singing "happy birthday" and I shouted, "Happy second birthday, dear Paul, happy birthday to yooooou!" Second film, second birthday. I cut up the cake and Steve passed the pieces out to everyone. Samantha had brought fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies. Chris got drunk and made a clatter, which turned out to be his inebriated blunder of knocking Mike's expensive camera off a shelf and spilling his beer.

Marina, Samantha and I talked a little about *Life on Mars*. The amazing thing about the plot of the film is that it is truly creative. It is spiritual, but it is not about a god, nor is it about nirvana or based on any existing religious or spiritual structure. It is not heavy-handed in its plot, and instead inspires a sense of the issues of darkness, power and danger inherent in the real

spiritual struggle by breaking conventions and allowing the viewer to approach the question of higher consciousness in a refreshing new light. You are left with a compelling tie between humans and fishlike alien life on another planet, and a sense that Gina, and probably all of humanity, is connected to this other world.

At one point in the night I went into the kitchen to get food to refill the snack bowls. Alec and Ivonne, who were doing the casting for the film, were standing by the kitchen sink talking.

"You and Paul seem so close. You even have the same mannerisms."

I smiled. "We've always been that way, even when we were children." I giggled to myself a moment. "One day when I was maybe ten and Paul was seven, my dad brought home a little card, you know those little cards that deaf people give out with the sign language alphabet on them? Well, my dad brought one home because he thought Paul and I might be interested in it, like, it's an educational thing. We learned the whole alphabet and threw away the card. Then we started speaking sign language at the dinner table. My parents were really mad. They separated us at the table, as if that were really going to do any good." Alec and Ivonne were laughing incredulously. "Paul and I have always been best friends. We never told our parents on each other. We were always bonded together. We never fought. I mean we didn't fight *at all.* My parents said they were actually worried because it was so unusual. Well...I did one thing to him, when I was like three and a half and Paul was maybe six months old. My mom told me that I unraveled the toilet paper all the way from the bathroom into the kitchen. When she looked at me and asked who did it, I pointed to my six-month-old crawling brother."

They laughed loudly and heartily.

"Also," I continued, "William and I don't fight either. We have stresses, money stresses and schedule clashes and differences in eating and sleeping patterns that affect the other, but we don't fight. We never accuse. We talk about how our behavior makes the other feel. One amazing thing is that we are both constantly in a state of being aware of how we affect the other and always care about the other's well-being and emotions. Always. It's a constant state. So we don't have to waste a lot of time and have a lot of clashes trying to make each other aware when we are doing something that's difficult for the other person. It just needs to be said, and then we try to make it easier, together, or to understand it so that the feeling of it being difficult lessens."

I enjoyed their company very much, and while I was restocking the snack bowls with chips and dip and cookies and mini carrots, I thought again about the conversation and was reminded of how blessed my interaction with William really was. It was that that brought us together, a capacity to be totally unselfconscious and aware and benevolent with each other and make that the backdrop of our lives. We are never uncomfortable with each other in our own home, even if William is working on a big resin-casting project that has taken over the kitchen for weeks. We trust each other not to ever disrespect the other.

William had a dream that night that we were shooting *Life on Mars,* and the Laguna Niguel location was all hung on rickety cables, which the crew had to walk precariously across. Paul was in a director's chair and every time he said "action," everyone held on to cables so the streets wouldn't rock.

Jeff arrived at 10 am the next morning to discuss production updates with Paul. Pre-production time was winding down. It was Saturday, February 25, and production was to begin Tuesday the 28th. Jeff explained that William and I would both get separate profit participation.

"You get points for investing money and for work on the film. It means you own a piece of the movie. The more money you invest or the more work you put in, the more of the movie you own. The more profit the movie makes, the greater value your percentage will yield." William and I will each be getting a quarter of a percent. If the movie makes a bunch of money, that could amount to thousands of dollars. If not, it may mean nothing.

Keith, the successful photographer friend of Paul's who has a portfolio of shooting many celebrities such as Yoko Ono and Werner Herzog, as well as covers of magazines such as Vogue, had promised to shoot the beach poster and other photos for Jennifer's bedroom wall four months ago and hasn't done it yet. Now he's in Paris, trying to make his own movie with a hand-held digital camera. He said Paul has inspired him.

"He did the same thing for *Freak,*" Paul lamented. "He was supposed to shoot all these stills of lingerie and girls and promised and promised and never did it. He has big bursts of positive energy, 'Oh, I'll do anything you want, I'd love to be involved…Oh, let me do those shots...' and never follows through."

Paul isn't angry, he half-expected this result. He knows he can deal with it, come up with another solution. I know Keith, and try to smile knowingly, somewhat bewildered at the inconsideration of what I've just learned.

Plans have been made for Ailee, Paul and I to go to Korea Town to get herbs for Gina's lab in Ailee's dark blue VW convertible with New York license plates. "This car has been all over the country," she says.

Our first stop was a Korean Acupuncture place where we got five amazing exotic-looking barks and herbs. The first one is orange spikes that might be dried flower petals. We couldn't tell and couldn't ask because the acupuncture practitioner spoke minimal English. Another herb is soft sheets of a bark or pulp, another is dried berry-looking pellets, the next is like light brown-gray wood or stem slices, and the last looks like shaved wood chips. At first the proprietors didn't seem to understand that we wanted visual aids for film props, but then the doctor started pulling out herbs and stuffing green bags with a purpose.

"I love him. He made my day," Ailee beamed. She told us of an instance where she had swallowed a little herbal pellet with silver in it when she was a kid and it had cured her. She was having symptoms of low energy and losing weight, and she took it and was told to injest nothing hotter than room temperature and it worked.

We passed by St. Andrews Place and 6th on our journey--I could see my old residence from the car window as we drove by. I thought about calling them and asking if they have any singles for rent to find out how much my rent went up since I moved from L.A. to Portland, Oregon in October of 2001. Paul said my studio apartment, which used to be $600 with parking, is probably $900 per month now. Stas' apartment in a new building down the street from Paul was $875 when he moved in and is now $1400 per month.

We then went to a Korean market and got dried mushrooms, dried black seaweed, little packets of herbs, dried flowers on long stems and ginger. The market was a few blocks from where I used to live but I had never been there. It was filled with all sorts of Gina's-lab-looking goodies with Asian writing on the packages.

The market had huge dried fishes two feet long on the bottom shelves and a plethora of exotic alchemical leaves and powders. There were huge dried squid and four-foot long dried seaweed and little bags of miniature dried fish and shrimp. Paul wanted things with varied colors and shapes.

"This is horrifying, I'm a Pisces," Ailee said, staring at the dried fish with wide eyes. It is a fascinating synchronicity that Paul, Samantha, Marina and Jesse are all Libras. "Of course I didn't know," Paul admitted. The information only came out later, after his decisions had been made. It is also synchronistic that Bryan Singer was born on September 17, the same day as our father, and they are two males in Paul's life that help Paul out.

William and I walked around the neighborhood for a while, scrounging around for Styrofoam to be used as art supplies, and passed by the screened-in warehouse of a lighting store around the corner from Paul where we saw stacks of foam that they were going to throw away. A warehouse worker saw us peering through the gate. When we explained ourselves that we were making a low budget film, he opened the gate and let us have it.

William had touched base with Paul to discern whether he should continue to pursue his work on Crystal City by experimenting with carved Styrofoam crystals, and Paul emphatically encouraged him. There is currently ambiguity as to which method of crystal making: Plexiglas rods, Styrofoam or crystal rental, is to be used at this late date. It seems that Paul is letting all avenues be explored and will choose the one he likes best when the end results are presented. William is frustrated because he knows they have to be made from clear Plexiglas, but with the appropriate angles and shape. He's determined to be their advocate; he feels he owes that to the crystals he loves.

My mom was glad to hear about the party when I called her as I was going through business calls for Paul. "I'm so happy you and Paul are together and doing great things." Then I called my friend Bridget and told her that I got to see William's second (only second!) rehearsal. He was really good, better than I thought he'd be, improvising with Samantha on cue and not overacting. "I'm not surprised, somehow," she said.

The next time I checked Paul's phone messages, this is what I heard: "This is Manuel the Spanish Robot. I am everywhere. Call me." This was said in a monotone voice with no phone number left so I asked Paul about it and he laughed when I played the message back for him.

"That's Ethan," he laughed. "We came up with this idea that at the end of every movie ever made, there should be a sequence where this old, rusty robot comes in and he's walking really slow like this…" Paul puts up his arms parallel to the floor and takes rigid, stiff-legged mechanical steps with glazed eyes, "…and everybody is TERRIFIED of him. They all start

screaming, EEEEEEK, NOOOOO! Help me! And the funny thing is they could be running away, but they're not, and all the while, the robot is raising one hand up with a gun in it, and it's all rusty and kind of popping and malfunctioning, raising this gun, and speaks in a metallic monotone voice, 'I am Manuel the Spanish Robot. I will kill you all,' and everyone is screaming NOOOOOOOOO and cowering, and the robot fires and misses and everyone screams EEEEEEEEEK and this scene takes like ten minutes with this rickety malfunctioning robot that can't aim...ha ha ha!"

We are both laughing with tears in our eyes and I said, "That's great! That's as great as *Moonstring*!"

Moonstring is an improbable science fiction movie that Paul dreamed up as a spoof on all the formulistic action adventure films that are turned out as if on an assembly line. The plot goes as follows: "So we figure out some way to string a big metal line from the earth and attach it to the moon so we can travel more easily, like on a big elevator, only we forget that the moon orbits, so then the moon starts getting towed by the line and it snaps back and starts pummeling towards earth and there's this big disaster with panicked scenes in NASA control rooms of them calculating time until impact and the military mustering up their weapons to try and cut the moonstring or blow up the moon but there's no time, and the moonstring starts buckling back and cuts the Statue of Liberty in half and people run screaming, and then there's the main guy who has his family killed by the moonstring so now he has a personal vendetta and swears to get even, and there's a scene of him standing on a hillside with his arms in the air in a gesture of challenge as the moonstring is whipping around the devastated landscape and he shouts, 'Is this the best you can do!' Ha ha! And the slogan in the trailer is: *Moonstring*: When it comes to fear, there *are* strings attached!"

Of course this is totally ridiculous but it is really not much more absurd than most Hollywood action films if you really look at them, which is what makes it so funny. "Besides," I told Paul, "there is such a thing as geosynchronous orbit, where, theoretically, you can attach a large object to a line, preferably on a low-gravity planet such as Mars, and run it to the outer atmosphere and match it to the planet's orbit, put it in geosynchronous orbit, and it will turn along with the planet and stay in place. So maybe a type of moonstring is theoretically possible."

We were waiting for Doug to be dropped off so that Paul and Doug could work on the shot book.

"You know," Paul said, "I think Doug is pretty amazing. He is so dedicated to his work. I can trust him. I trust him to be competent and to hear what I want, and he's so organized. I'm organized, but he's a whole order better organized than I am."

"He wheels that thing everywhere," William said, referring to Doug's huge briefcase on wheels, "and he doesn't seem to mind."

"Yeah," Paul answered, with a tone of respect and amazement in his voice, "he'll do anything. To me that would be a huge imposition. He does all this stuff, he'll go without eating, work without a break, make sure every detail that he envisions is as accurate as he could make it, and only then will he rest. And he does it all quietly. He does all this stuff and you don't even realize it and he never complains. He'll sleep on the floor, it doesn't matter, not when it comes to his job."

When Doug arrived, we watched *The Exorcist* and had Thai delivery for dinner. Paul said that Arthur Storch, who plays the psychiatrist at the beginning of *The Exorcist,* screened a film Paul made in high school starring Mr. Dolcemascolo, his ninth grade English teacher, depicting a death and resurrection, and that helped get him accepted to USC.

Doug and Paul then began going through the lighting for each scene, deciding whether each shot should be lit warm or cold. They watched scenes from various movies so Paul could illustrate what he wanted. Doug watched with intelligent eyes, making notes in his book, with the energy of a monk and an engineer combined.

I've been a little worried about money the past couple days, spending money for food, art supplies and the launch party, which I had taken over, realizing that the budget for it wasn't nearly high enough to make it a respectable event. But I've also had such stark feelings of gratitude at times, almost convulsions of gratitude with heart swells at the slightest provocation, when Paul reached behind William while watching *The Exorcist* to hand me an egg roll, when I woke up and found myself there and not being buzzed awake by an alarm to go to a placeholder job, I had a wave of feeling that these people who surround me now, Paul and William and Doug, are so good, they care about me, and the naturalness and ease with which this takes place is a joy and a relief from so many impersonal, abrasive encounters we are subjected to in daily

life, at work; now the days open before me, they are lived through with a busyness and a feeling of belonging to a group all working for a common goal. *And that's the way it used to be, for virtually everyone. You owned a farm or a butcher shop or a bakery, or were the country doctor, and if your wife had a baby you could pay with a loaf of bread every week for a year. What has happened? What have we done to ourselves, to our lives? The health care industry boasts a 26% profit increase per year now, that's more than the oil industry at 21%. That's not business, that's criminal, when your local pizza pub's annual profit increase of 2% is considered a raging success and health insurance coverage erodes visibly every year as you're paying through the wazoo out of sheer fear for a service that now offers, virtually, nothing.*

Paul suddenly bounds over, "Whatcha writin', whatcha writin', huh, huh, huh?" He bounces onto the airbed in glasses and pajamas, where William and I are settling in to go to sleep. I tell him, and he says, "That's what's so great about it, creativity, and it's interesting that you tend to think everybody feels that they have to create something, then you talk to them and they don't have the same consciousness. I want to make movies because I have so much inside I have to let out, and it's not just my own dumb vision, everyone is unique, it's that if David Lynch just ignored his urges, said 'ahhhh,'" he waves his hand in dismissal, "my life would be so much less. If all those guys, Lynch, Spielberg, Tarkovsky, if they all ignored their visions, my life would not be good. That's what drives me.

"In some ways it's perfect, it has to be the right script. It all came together. Even a couple years ago I had something brewing in me but I didn't have the right story. In some ways I wish it could be a little easier, but in other ways I feel that right now is perfect because it's all coming together and I have so much more skill than even two years ago and I know it's right."

I smiled. "I feel the same way. I tried to write a book proposal for a self-help book that Andrew Harvey suggested I do, then another essay, *Spirit and Revolution*, but there were money problems and it didn't come together and now this flows and I feel like I could write ten of these, but I think, 'Is it smaller?' I mean, when I read Aurobindo it is so grand, and when I think of the scope of what Hemingway writes it seems smaller, but then I read Hemingway and it fills me up so much, so when I think of my own writing I think, 'Is this smaller? Am I diminishing?' Papini had a thing like that, he carried around the world and the whole of history and then couldn't express it and broke down. I think there's something un-integrated in me around that because it

doesn't make logical sense to see the value in telling a story well objectively but not apply that value to myself."

"But that's always been the thing with you," Paul replied matter-of-factly, "are you an artist or are you a mystic? There's no reason that you can't be in this project in this way, as a storyteller, and then in a philosophical spiritual mode in another project."

So when I get up in the morning Paul is at his computer and, lo and behold, there is an e-mail from Keith. Paul has been writing him and calling him for days asking for an update about how the posters are coming. So Keith finally writes back: "My film shoot is going very well here in Paris. The weather has been really good. There was only one day where the weather worked against us because it was too windy to get good sound, so we moved the shoot indoors and it worked even better than we originally planned." Then he had typed after this message, "No stress :)" Then, as if this wasn't complete enough, he informed us in a postscript of the important missing information, "I've also been eating gourmet food."

"Ugh! I can't believe it!" Paul groans, knocking his forehead with the heel of his hand in despair. "He's done this before!" Keith was so inspired by Paul's idea and enthusiasm when he was putting together his film that he wrote a script in two weeks and set up a trip to Paris to stay in an actress friend's house and shoot a feature film on digital. It has the same tone as Paul's, a story with ambiguity and mystery, but the idea itself is very much his own. On February 20, Paul sent him an e-mail requesting the photos he was supposed to send. Then he sent another on February 22, saying that we are exploring other options, that Mike Lynch has a camera and that we are considering him as a backup. Then this morning, February 26th, the above e-mail arrived.

Paul shook his head, "I knew he was not reliable. I've known it all along. He came to me and begged for a producer position, 'Paul, I promise I'll work my ass off for you.' But the thing is if he gets too much stress he becomes a drug addict and has to go to rehab, so keeping stress low is, to him, being healthy. He got married and had a lot of responsibility and all these jobs and got into pot and painkillers and had to go to rehab."

I was a little startled. "When did this happen? I haven't seen Keith in a while but I didn't know any of this."

"Oh, about two or two and a half years ago. His photography is blossoming now."

"Wow, I guess it's been awhile."

"I just won't give him a producer credit. I won't tell him, I'll just keep taking his money. He won't get any producer points. He'll be on as an investor because he's contributed $2,500 and if his investment total gets really high I'll give him an executive producer status, if they get in the range of $20,000 to $25,000. Same with Jack. I want to remain friends, I know that's the way he is and I enjoy his company."

Paul's message machine suddenly resurrects itself as his friend Ellis' voice echoes an improbably similar message to Ethan's. "Super, super, super, super, super mega robot." Ellis hangs up.

It's supposed to rain on Tuesday, the first day of the shoot. "What Teo suggested is to shoot Gina's bedroom on Tuesday, it's supposed to be day four, then it frees up the space for permanent storage," Paul says to Doug on the phone. "I don't mind if I see rain outside." He cuts his fingernails into a small wastebasket at his computer as he talks. "So what we discussed is doing day two on day one with the rain, then with Teo I discussed shooting Gina's bedroom on the first day...okay." I glance at Paul's VHS clock and it says 11:11, a synchronicity that my friend Bridget and I used to experience a lot as roommates in grad school.

"Samantha's been pretty open to changing the schedule but she'd like us to give her as much advance notice as possible...Tomorrow we'd probably have a better idea of what the weather will be like on Wednesday..." Paul makes a series of phone calls. Talking with Rick Castanedas he says, "I apologize for my poor judgment with Keith and for letting it get this late..." He turns to me after he hangs up. "More mopping up the Keith thing. He knows any problem that arises can get solved."

"Yeah, but he doesn't own his part in it. He's not acting like a responsible adult. He just needs to say, 'I can't do it,' and apologize."

"Yes, that's right. He doesn't take responsibility for his actions."

Steve Sprung is coming to drop off a bar of glycerin soap to use in an experiment as a medium that we might be able to carve crystals from. The trouble with Crystal City so far, in a nutshell, is that William's foam crystals are perfectly shaped, but not translucent, while Teo's Plexiglas crystals are translucent, but imperfectly shaped. There is a possibility of getting some

real crystal clusters on loan from a museum down the street, or, now, this new option of carving clear glycerin soap.

Rick Castanedas and Asa, the animators, are dealing with the photos that Keith flaked on. Paul has been on the phone for two hours straight, from 10 am to noon, and is now in the shower awaiting Steve Sprung. I had to bring him cereal at his computer or he would not have eaten.

Steve arrives, all smiles, and we wait for William to return from getting art supplies. Paul is shooting the film on 16 mm film stock and he and Steve talk about the joy of editing actual film rather than digital. William walks in and tells a tale of running into Truth, the long brown-haired, blue-eyed, Tibetan garb-wearing manager of the tonic bar. As William walked through a park on his way back to Paul's, Truth was conducting a Tai Chi workshop on a grassy knoll. He waved to William and said, "Your Mμ-Ankh pendant completely changed my life. I want to market them." One of the guys in the workshop bought another Mμ-Ankh on the spot.

Paul says that during the shooting of *Freak Talks About Sex*, his first feature film, he had a little monitor and headphones and he couldn't see the actors' faces and hear them well and when he saw the footage he was surprised at some of the stuff he didn't remember seeing. So now he needs the monitor to be high quality when he has to use one and he needs to be closer to the actors to see and hear the nuances of their expressions and their performance. "Which, if you think about it, is at the very core of what I have to do."

We tried going to a couple paint stores, which were closed, and then looked around at an expensive Beverly Hills crystal store called the Crystalarium. Paul was considering renting two large crystal clusters. He picked up a rental agreement from Robin, the owner, and we looked at all the amazing amethyst geodes, an elestial quartz crystal a foot tall, beautiful natural tanzanite crystals in gold wrap-around pendant settings, a huge rose quartz sloped sculpture you could sit on, a two foot diameter clear quartz sphere with rainbows, all just amazing.

Then on to the Larchmont neighborhood, where I used to work when I lived in L.A., and got a Jamba Juice and bought a bath bomb, a fizzy sphere of bath salts and baking soda for the fizzy beakers in the chemistry lab. The woman was really nice and gave Paul and I a bunch of exotic shampoo and body wash samples in little bottles. Then we went to Teo's to check out his Plexiglas crystals. We walked up the spiral staircase with brick-colored floor tiles and began to see white shavings in the hallway leading to the balcony where a portable table saw sat surrounded by puffy white clouds a foot high. This fluff is in Teo's hair and all over his clothes.

It looks like cheap Hollywood snow. The crystals are six-sided rods with unfinished tips. They are totally uniform but may work in conjunction with the real crystal clusters we saw at the Crystalarium.

In the car going back to Paul's place, Jesse calls. He is in Burbank for two days on business, then he's going back for a couple days and then coming back into town to attend the Independent Spirit Awards ceremony and to shoot his role in *Life on Mars.*

It is interesting that everybody seems to have a different interpretation of the film. With my background in Western psychology and Eastern philosophy, I had a distinct interpretation that emerged in and of itself. For me, it is a totally innovative view of "enlightenment" that is depicted. Gina uses a combination of Eastern and Western methods, meditation and physics/chemistry, to evoke the return of matter, not to light, as many Eastern traditions hold, but to *water*, which I interpret that the film designates as our true nature. There is a myriad of archetypes used throughout the film supporting the theme of transformation, such as butterfly imagery after Jennifer's death, a recurring reference to birds, which are symbols of transformation in and of themselves in addition to Farid ud din Attar's imagery used in *The Conference of the Birds* in which the crow, the swan, the peacock, the pelican and the phoenix illustrate progress through the spiritual path (the crow and the swan are prominent in the film).

Water is referred to several times in unconventional ways, evoking a titillating feeling of mystique. Then there are the cuts onto the alien planet, where dying amphibious creatures lumber along a dry and desolate landscape. We are never sure whether Gina is connected directly to these aliens, or whether she herself *is* an alien, or whether the imagery is wholly metaphorical. But if we assume the position that the aliens are real, then it can follow that Gina is connected to the return of water to the alien planet after humans seem to disappear on earth at the end, and if humans in the form of matter return to their true nature as *water*, then that can infer the return to the godhead where the aliens are *gods*. How delightfully unique and refreshing! It is also refreshing that this, by far, isn't the only way to interpret the film. It is mine, and I derive great joy in discovering this interpretation from my own quest and a sense of excitement that others can do this as well.

I just learned that I will be needed to set up the coffee and continental breakfast at the Laguna Niguel house, which is also the set. Ailee, who was originally going to do it, is not going to be sleeping at the house. "You need to have it ready before people arrive, especially a full pot of coffee because if not, people will be totally pissed."

In the midst of his ongoing flood of phone calls, Paul relays that the community in the woods scene, to be shot at some later date, was originally going to be staged in the mountains but it turned out to be too dangerous and Doug couldn't get his equipment over the stream there, so now they're shooting on a farm they scouted out next to a chicken coop, though you wouldn't be able to tell.

Paul and William have another concerned talk about rivalry that continues to be present between William and Teo. It is likely that Teo expected his help to be a lackey with a car to run errands around town, to get art supplies and props. Since Teo himself had no car and no space to work, having another artist brought on board requiring space, as well as working on a key task (the Crystal City) that should fall under Teo's direction, was an infringement to him. Paul loves the fact that William has so many useful skills, but William's enthusiasm is easily misconstrued by Teo as claim-jumping on his rightful territory. When William and I came down we had assumed we would find a group of people all working joyously together for a single purpose. That may sound naïve, but having Paul as our primary connection we were insulated from the sea of personalities it takes to get a film shot. We assumed everyone would be on the same creative page. Later that night William said, "It's hard for me to accept that someone can do their job well without having a deep understanding of what the film's about."

Paul confessed that he himself had ego during *Freak* when Doug would present the shots during the tech scout and Paul was aware that he came up with them and wanted to present them himself. But, in reality, the DP is actually serving as a kind of speaker for the director; yes, he has creative influence, but the director has the final say.

Maybe production designers are by nature touchy because Paul also had conflict with the production designer on *Freak.* He would give instructions like, "Let's have a basket of bread on the table here," and she brought out a huge thing and Paul said it looked really unrealistic but she thought she was being creative and copped an attitude, "All right, fine." Paul said she was much worse than Teo, who told William he "had it covered" every time William offered a suggestion for Crystal City. William called and offered his services from Paul's place, because Teo had no

room, and Teo never called back. There was another person in the production office on *Freak*, besides the production designer, that they had had a problem with. They had to confront her and say that they were going to fire her if she didn't shape up, and after that she did. There are politics in every organized group.

William has collected special drinks for the shoot, special packets of vegan "super food" meal replacements to help him deal with the hectic pace to come. He is still concerned with Crystal City being believable. He's not doing this for credits. He doesn't need photos to add to his portfolio. Paul agrees that he does not want some Superman set or Christmas tree light-looking thing. William remarked on Teo's tendencies to over dress the set. He heard Teo remark that this is how it's done. Put in everything you've got and then by a process of subtraction pare it down to what's needed. This was probably operative in Teo's desire to erect a whole shantytown in the woods after Paul made it clear that he just wanted tents. Shaking his head, Paul said, "I challenge you to find a bunch of people in L.A. just like us." In other words, the chances of finding a whole crew of people who read Rumi, meditate and make movies to express their spiritual vision rather than accrue money and power are, to be honest, zero.

We are discussing food and accommodations. I talk to Jeff about taking care of food and supplies for the Laguna Niguel house. We talk about film and the importance of everyone taking responsibility for their part in military-like fashion and the heart involved in a venture like this. "I'm able to relax when capable people are assigned tasks. Be the Den Mother of Hotel Laguna Niguel."

The topic of Keith promising the photographic work and then disappearing was broached again to update Jeff, who said, "That's absurd. It's like you're on a starship. Everyone has a role and you're in battle and the situation changes and you deal with it."

Paul addressed the issue that Teo's maybe feeling a little slighted because Paul is spending more time with Doug that with him. Paul explains, "The lighting must be absolutely perfect. The shots must be detailed and framed perfectly. I'm sorry, but that's my preference."

Another thing comes into Paul's precious blue-eyed countenance when he is defending his art. An unapologetic focus possesses him that says nothing will get in the way, nothing. Too many years were spent working towards this, upping the stakes day by day, and now, in the moment of reckoning, it *will* work, because I won't allow it not to, or die trying. *There is*

nothing there except that. It isn't a matter of choice. That's what they don't understand out there, those scores of middle class Americans who can work for money and love what they have, not what they do. If, instead, you are creative and have something put inside you that you must speak, you can feel a part of yourself begin to die if you try to forsake it, a place of desolation cracks open inside and begins to grow into a cavern until there is no spontaneous vitality left. You look up at the sun and pine, because you are so diminished that it no longer reaches you. That is death, the absence of the affirmation of life. And death is not acceptable.

Jeff broached the subject that there was tension between Teo and Doug as well. Teo experienced Doug as confrontational and Jeff had to have a talk with him. Jeff had said to Paul, "I know this guy, Teo. We were roommates and he's done production design work, and is a really hard worker. An extremely hard worker. He won't let you down that way." So Jeff convinced Paul to hire Teo along with himself, even though he mentioned that Teo had "some anger management problems." So now Jeff had to have a talk with Teo, leveraging off the rapport between them. As Paul says of Doug, "When there's something wrong, when there's a mistake, Doug will not let it go. He keeps returning to it over and over until it is eradicated. That can be experienced as confrontation but it's actually not. It is not personal." It is important to check out and tune up all the parts of the starship before it blasts off, and in this task Jeff says, "I take care of the shell and Paul takes care of the details."

I had a dream that William, Paul and I were staying in a cabin with windows all around and the sun streaming in, like a mountaintop lookout cabin. A woman who might have been Diane Nesley, the real estate agent who rented us the Laguna Niguel house, was seen approaching the door through the windows. She introduced us to a bunch of photographers and interviewers. There were women sitting around at the forest lodge eating and talking in a family reunion sort of way. The photographers came in and we were still in our pajamas. We tried to get away from them so we could eat our organic, vegetarian breakfast set on beautiful rustic tables, but they kept following us. Upon entering, Paul was introduced as "the angel" or something like that. Then William and I tried to sneak away to go to the movies, but a photographer kept following us around. I had no shoes and was running through these halls barefoot, through auditoriums and conference rooms and classrooms. I went into a locker room

and a girl was in the shower and I stole her white socks and sneakers. I was trying to get back to William, and ran into him occasionally, but we had to split up to avoid the photographer.

William had had a dream that there was a biplane storming the house and Paul was on his cell phone and William tried to alert him and he told William not to worry about it. The biplane crashed and William wanted to call 911 and finally did, and the emergency response person didn't believe him and told him it's a felony to report a bogus incident. William went outside and the plane was on fire and the pilot was still in it. I thought, *was this related to possible complications surrounding Teo's saying "don't worry about it" whenever something came up? William is often precognitive, so was this a glimpse of foresight into potential disaster that he couldn't make others see?*

I told Paul that Jeff felt making a film was like being on a starship. Paul laughed with a sparkle, "It's so true! You're with a crew and things come up and you deal with them."

"Yeah, but I don't want no wimpy Enterprise with some sissy Captain Kirk at the helm," William chimed in with an affected rapper voice.

"I like Captain Kirk," I replied, making a playful stand.

"Bullshiiiiit! I want pure Klingon. Some dude acts up– two boney-headed officers slam him against the bulkhead. Then they all laugh as their lizard-like mascot ambles over and laps up the misunderstandin'."

So Paul gets off the phone and says, "Today is one of those days where everything is going right. Kevin Hatfield mailed me a check today out of the blue. He said he was going to three months ago and he never returned any of my calls or e-mails and suddenly he writes me an e-mail telling me he just sent a check for $5,000. Loni Peristere is talking to his business partner about raising the last $35,000 to finish the shoot. One of his partners is sold on it, he says he'll do it if the other is into it. He is now reading the script. The Keith thing is totally being dealt with.

"Loni is building the landscape for *Beyond* and said that we could use it. We have located some creature suits that were used for a Dairy Queen commercial through Robert. He says that they can be altered and used for the alien scenes in the film." Paul gave an excited bounce and smiled boyishly.

"What about that small production company that was going to invest $10,000?" I inquired, happy and hopeful.

"We got rid of them. They kept demanding more and more shit, greater percentages and rights to the film, and we finally said, 'forget it.' It was a relief, really. They were like, sign a contract that Jesse is definitely in the film and this and that. No matter what you do, you can get sued when all that shit happens so it's not worth it. My manager, Ben Tappan, will send $1,000."

"It's a new moon in Pisces tomorrow," William grins, "and there's two weeks of upswing energy that follows a new moon. Pisces is touchy-feely, and secretive. So there may be secrets that you must stay on top of."

At Erewhon's elixir bar, Randy mixes us medicinal Chinese tonics.

"This is Paul, the director of the film."

Introductions are made and we all watch, hypnotized by this modern day rendition of ancient Chinese alchemy– as hot tea is mixed with an exotic assortment of tinctures dispensed from little dropper bottles and powders poured out of gelatin capsules. All of this is done with a quiet assurance after each of us described our present state of health. Paul watches with a raw sense of awe, "You know, even though I've had a lot of sleep I have no mental space to take this in." He indicates a book of herbs and their uses that lies in front of him. "I don't want to open this book and find out what's in this drink, and at any other time I'd be like, wow, what's this?"

"We'll take care of you right now. You can find out about this tradition later."

The drinks are like reviving and nerve-soothing magic. We express our thanks and look around for a few groceries before we leave. A woman who had come up to the tonic bar eyed my notebook and said to me, "You look very organized. Are you a trainer?" She has long graying hair and a natural new age glow.

"Well, actually, I'm working on a film," I inform her.

"You are?"

"We're about to leave for the shoot after we leave here."

"Really? What is the film about?"

I begin to pitch the story line to her and she lights up when she hears it is a film about the evolution of consciousness. She urges me to wait just a second and runs off, returning with a

box of cereal in her hand and another woman. The cereal is called Peace Cereal and she holds up the box next to her face, like an advertisement. Her face is on the cover. She brandishes the box of Maple Pecan Crisp and introduces herself as Janice Belson and the younger woman as her daughter, Johanna.

Janice has been in an accident and received a $280,000 settlement and has decided to use it to do something she is passionate about. So Janice and Johanna founded Medicines Global, a nonprofit organization that brings medical supplies from the West to impoverished countries. That is what got her on the cover of a Peace Cereal box. Johanna also directs commercials and is making a documentary film on life and death themes. She recounts that one man had open-heart surgery and was 'dead' for a day and a half. Janice, who is a still photographer by trade, produces her card and hands one to me and one to Paul. "Here's how I can be reached if you need my services."

"I'm making a movie that can't be made." Paul grins across the table. "A first-timer couldn't pull the resources together that are necessary to make a film like this. And someone along in their career wouldn't be stupid enough to make it," he grins again. "They'd just build on their previous success and not try to do something so arty and risky. My agent says, 'What if Richard Gere doesn't want to make the Lynchian version of *Something Happened*?'"

Richard Gere has attached himself to play the lead role of Bob Slocum in the film adaptation of the novel, *Something Happened*. Bryan is working on getting a letter from Richard stating that he'll accept a "pay or play offer." There is no hold up with the contract that the attorney is revising. If Richard Gere drops out, they will go to Philip Seymour Hoffman.

As far as *Life on Mars* goes, Paul says, "At some point you just surrender to the whole thing, whatever happens, and just shoot."

We are in the car running errands; I went to the bank and Paul stopped at a gas station nearby and grabbed a sandwich.

"This is how my meals work. When I see an opportunity to grab food, I just get it so it doesn't slow me down."

Paul's cell phone rings and it is Doug. He talks a couple minutes and then hangs up and says, "People sometimes have a problem with Doug until they see who he is."

Back at Paul's apartment, we are in a whirl of cleaning and packing to leave L.A. for the shoot in Laguna Niguel. Paul is trying to get some last minute business done with the Writer's Guild that was supposed to get done earlier but didn't.

We hear that there is rain in the forecast for a couple days in Laguna Niguel while we are waiting for Doug to be dropped off around 3 pm so we can all go down together. Paul was just on the phone with Keith at the Victor Hugo Cafe in Paris, and Keith says he's sending $3,000 more on March 12 when he gets back. He apologized and said he couldn't imagine how the issue of the photos got so screwed up, but it wasn't totally honest because he knew about them way in advance. Paul was cool and honest, "We've got it all covered," but not, "It's okay." Keith claimed he had sent photos of the shark and the girl on the beach, but, of course, they were never received.

William was just talking to his sister Janet, a Charismatic faith healer, and she will be praying for all of us this week as we embark on this huge journey. "He just needs a little help," she says about Teo. "He won't bother you any more." He's now on her prayer list too, along with Madonna and about two hundred other people.

Paul makes a series of calls; to Jeff Beard about internet access, to Jimmy Daddabbo about William's energy tool clause in the production contract, to Diane Nesley discussing her role in the film, and to his manager Ben Tappan. There is so much that has to be addressed by so few people in a low budget film. A thousand things will be taken care of beforehand and there will still be a thousand things that arise on the spot.

This is in shocking contrast to a big budget film. Doug worked on *War of the Worlds* for two weeks as an electrician. He was up on a scaffold manning a light with another guy--two guys to man one light. I was amazed at the difference in the two scenarios. Our entire cast and crew, for most days, will total about thirty.

In the car, Doug began making a preliminary video documenting us embarking on our journey. Before we left, Paul said, "You'll only have a tiny little area in the car. You may have to put something on your lap."

"I don't give a shit," I exclaimed, bopping and flailing in his face like a child about to go to Disneyland. "Samwise doesn't give a shit! Samwise can do anything!" Paul and I hug, cheek to cheek, like bouncing children going, "yeah yeah yeah!"

"What a pair!" William smiles at us like the magnanimous parent of two kids that have just arrived at the Magic Kingdom.

As I am sitting in the car looking at the lanes of other cars zipping around me, my best friend Bridget calls for an update. "Beeeeeeee!" I exclaimed at her, as I usually do. I spoke with her and then handed the phone to William. She was feeling a little left out of the proceedings and William said to her, "Maria is just a voice in the back seat and you are a voice and that's kind of equivalent. You are very much in the hearts of three people here." Bridget later told me that those words, more than anything else either of us had said, made her feel connected.

Meanwhile, Paul and Doug have been putting their brains together and psyching themselves up for Day 1. Paul favors an emphasis on lighting and subtle scoring. "When William Friedkin was filming *The Exorcist*, the music guy over scored it and Friedkin threw the tape out in the street in front of the music guy's family and screamed, 'That's where this music belongs!' There's hardly any music in *The Exorcist* and Friedkin was so meticulous about every little detail. That's why saying 'It's a wrap' in that scene was so cheesy and surprising, she was asking questions about the scene she was filming and there was one take and that was it. It was really unrealistic."

We stopped to eat at Denny's and toted the video camera in with us.

Doug was talking about interviewing people for the assistant camera positions and said, "When I was 18 my resume was three pages long, now it's one page and it says 'over 200 commercials.'"

"When I was about 10 to 13, I was obsessed with movies and my mom and dad wouldn't let me see them twice, they didn't see the point in it, it was kind of prohibited to even suggest it. I finally convinced them to let me see *Poltergeist* again and brought a tape recorder into the theater and I must have listened to that recording in my ears 70 or 80 times," Paul grinned. I remember him listening to that recording. I remember him reciting the movie verbatim once he bought a VHS player with his allowance money.

Doug said, "My parents supported me in everything I wanted to do. They were never like, 'What do you mean you want to get into theater?'"

William said, "By the time I was 7, I had memorized two dozen Bible verses. It was a game I played with my older sister. But everyone in our church assumed it meant I was going to be a Baptist minister. Based on that collective assumption, at 14, I became one– a Youth

Minister. Their own little preaching prodigy. At 18, they decided to make me a deacon but had to get special permission from their denomination's headquarters to make it official. Everything was proceeding according to plan, their plan, until the day I received a list of books that all freshmen had to read the summer before attending Denison University. I read *The Plague* by Albert Camus and it completely blew me away. That was the first time I realized there was a whole other world out there I had never imagined."

"When I got into computer games, my parents suggested computer programming," Paul recalled.

"Yeah, and I was always writing, and was encouraged to go into academia," I answered.

"I've never submitted a resume in my life," William announced. "Every job I've ever had just sort of backed into me. People just said, 'You want to do this?' Sure."

Paul said, "In the film industry you get hired free-lance for a day or a week and if you don't screw up you get on their list to be called back."

Our food arrives and as we eat, we talk about our passions and predispositions to the artistic life. William shares some of the bizarre and entertaining stories he's acquired through his job selling mushrooms at a farmer's market. Then he talks about his friend Alan, whose father was a mining engineer, and all the exotic places Alan lived as a child as a result. Alan is pure Italian, but was born in Cairo, Egypt. At one point, when Alan was in his teens, his father had a contract in Jamaica. His mother wanted to enroll him into a private school, where classes were taught in French, but his father took Alan down to the docks and found some barefoot Rastafarian fishermen. He hired them to show Alan how they made their living. "I have only one condition," he told them, "You can't let him drown." So Alan spent the rest of the summer learning how to dive for lobsters and selling them to restaurants and tourist hotels. Alan remembers that summer to this day with great fondness. Paul loved this story, which unconventionally embodied a trust that caters to liberating the spirit.

"You know what I hate?" Paul grimaces exaggeratedly. "Whitney Houston's *I'll Always Love You*. Ugh. It's the antithesis of life and passion."

We arrived at the Laguna Niguel house, opened the door, and stepped into total chaos. Haphazard cardboard is taped on all the floors. Huge metal boxes containing lighting equipment are laid out in the living room. Most of the furniture is gone. The rest of it is strewn about

randomly. We discover that most of the missing furniture is stored up in the rafters of the garage. I go there and look up in disbelief. Boards had been laid across the rafters so pieces of exquisite Stickley furniture could be stuffed in the vaulted space above. The same chairs my mother put towels over so we wouldn't soil their silken white fabric now had their legs sticking out sideways like a herd of slaughtered cows. One hung precariously over the edge. It was so dangerously teetering, you couldn't imagine how it defied gravity.

Dumbfounded, I glanced around; the garage is packed with folding tables, bags of food, a rag-tag assembly of boxes of props for Gina's basement. The garage, which previously held two cars, was *full*. People's belongings were everywhere, in the halls, stuffed in the closet, in the corners of the living room mingled with the lighting equipment, which included a clustered forest of metal stands. The two bedrooms are completely transformed; there are stuffed animals, colored tapestries, jewelry boxes and hairclips strategically placed about, the *beds* themselves have been switched, God knows how. The place is alive, made, literally, into something else. The old spirit has departed and replaced with something entirely different, the mystique behind the scenes laid raw.

As I begin to orient myself, I get busy fixing the coffee, bringing stuff in from the car, and grounding myself in the new incarnation of the Laguna Niguel house. I realize with a start that the light globe on the pole in front of the house is broken, and parked next to it is a huge grip and lighting truck. The driveway is filled with cars, none of which can stay there overnight without violating the parking rules of the community. Doug, William and I are now in the main bedroom. William gives Paul and me red jasper triangles, little talismans, and keeps one for himself. We touch them all together and form a tetrahedron as an invocation.

There is bustling confusion about sleeping quarters. William and I are sensitive to Doug and want to make sure his sleeping accommodations on the floor of the main bedroom are okay. William and I have the bed, and everybody is getting ready to turn in for the night.

William informs Doug across the room, "Maria's compulsively writing over here." Doug says it's time for him to get to sleep. As everyone climbs under their covers, I tiptoe to the bathroom and write frantically on the bathroom sink to catch up on the day's notes.

Paul is in the small bedroom on an air mattress on the floor. Marina, who plays Jennifer in the film, is on the bed. There was an initial air of discomfort on her part having the director

sleeping on the floor while she's on the bed, but Paul kept insisting that Jennifer get familiar with her surroundings.

In the middle of the night a windstorm blows in off the ocean, rattling the windows furiously. A tarp was tied to the side of the house to shelter props that didn't fit inside. This was great foresight considering the foul weather expected, except the tarp begins to flap in the wind wildly, making a racket. After a while Doug got up and closed the window completely to try and get some sleep. This went on for quite some time until, suddenly, like a huge lumbering ghost, the tarp broke free from its moorings and flew upwards onto the roof with a mighty thud and scuffle. Art department people who were sleeping in the den next to our bedroom came running out of the sliding-glass doors with flashlights and gathered up the rain-splattered props strewn about the yard by gale force winds. *My god, they look like soldiers out there,* I thought, and drifted into a shallow and broken sleep.

Chapter 6

War and the Art of Filmmaking

I turned my alarm off before it sounded and William, who was awake too, got out of bed with me as quietly as we could. We pulled on our clothes in the darkness and crept out. The clock read 5:15 am. It was foggy outside and sprinkling lightly. We found Paul's car down the hill on Flying Cloud and drove to the mall to go to Albertson's and get breakfast food for the cast and crew. It was closed. This was frustrating because I needed to have the stuff ready by 6 am, though not surprising, my precognitive worries fulfilled. We headed down Alicia Parkway to find something else. We eventually came to a Vons and ran around gathering bagels, cream cheese, orange juice, and fruit. We found a checkout stand with an Open sign but no cashier there. We yelled for a checker and she wasn't authorized to open that till, so she had to process the scannable items at the Starbucks counter across the aisle. Then we had to go through the regular line to buy the produce but the guy didn't give us our club discount. As we had a ridiculous budget, some $30 or so, (*what is that, a buck a person?)* we needed the sale price. After some pleading and explaining our plight, the guy rang his own discount card through and adjusted our slip. We rushed back and set up the coffee and food.

Steve Sprung knocked on the door and I let him in and went to park down the hill. Steve pulled out his video camera and began interviewing people as they arrived or dragged themselves out of their lairs, rumpled, reeling and bleary. I saw his video eye over my shoulder as I was feverishly jotting notes at the kitchen sink. He informed me that I had put my t-shirt on inside out.

Rehearsals then began amidst a cluster of walkie-talkie bearing crew for the scene with Jennifer and Gina discovering the altered plant. "We're going to do a marking walk-through."

This means that the places where the actresses are to land are marked with tape on the floor and they rehearse, landing on their marks to see how it plays. A screen has been erected outside the window to change the lighting from a dreary steady rain to a warm sunny afternoon. In the film it is supposed to be summer, maybe June or July, when in fact it is February. *It will be June or July in that room today, by God, no matter what the weather has to say.*

I run off to mail a registration letter that Paul needs sent. It was difficult finding a mailbox in this weird, sterile land of manicured green lawns and pastel-colored condos. There are worms in the street and the gutters are overflowing. I eventually go all the way back to where I was this morning but at this early hour, the mini strip malls are deserted. I finally find one, deposit the letter with a sigh of relief, and drive back. As I walk in the door, I'm immediately recruited as a stand-in.

Doug is extremely meticulous in setting up the shot by the transformed plant.

"We have made it so that you can see the camera in the picture. Can you angle it? Now you can see the tape ball. Give me another millimeter..." When Doug is satisfied, he directs, "We need to have an actress do the walk-through, protect the marks. We're waiting for Amber."

Amber is the sound girl, who shortly arrives, juggling carts of electronics on wheels. Paul, Marina and Samantha are in the main bedroom rehearsing. The garage is absolutely cluttered with equipment, bottled water, bulk snacks, carts, extra furniture, Home Depot boxes of props, tables, globes, lighting miscellaneous. Amber is setting up the sound equipment in the kitchen.

A lot of time goes by. I would think making February into July is no small task. Actually, it requires magic. Right now, it looks like a bunch of soggy crew fumbling with great white boards in metal holders outside, a lot of sign language passing between Doug and them through the window.

The two actresses are ready to walk. They go through a rehearsal, and as they do so, there is constant motion. Doug adjusts the lighting. Tarina, the gaffer, takes a light reading by their faces several times. Doug briefs Seth, the assistant director, on what they are going to do. People adjust screens. They take cardboard off the floor on cue while retaining the tape on the carpet where the actresses must pause. Paul says, "Can we rehearse one more time?" Everyone

immediately assumes starting position with snappy efficiency. It is amazing for me to see. *Paul can ask anyone to do anything and they will.*

Doug strides around with a light meter and tests the lighting at the window in the hall. He is completely absorbed in his environment, oblivious to the people hovering around. I watch a rehearsal over Paul's shoulder on the monitor set up in the other room. He stands there, rapt, headphones over his ears, "And ... action." A clapboard fills the screen, which says, "*Life on Mars*, Director: Paul Todisco, Scene 37, Director of Photography: Doug Shannon, 2/28/06." The board claps and disappears.

Jeff passes by me, leaning in conspiratorially, "The starship has launched."

A bunch of us crowd around and watch on the 8" Panavision monitor as the first real take is shot. There is total silence. "Cut...thank you. Good job." Paul's director's chair sits in front of the monitor, black with lime green lettering on the back, which reads, "Looks of Hollywood."

"Picture's up! Everybody clear screen please...roll count...camera..."

"Waiting for the plant to settle..."

A loud clap sounds from the clapboard.

"Action."

The world freezes.

"Cut."

The world re-animates.

The second take is completed. It is followed by a third and a fourth, which are stopped in the middle.

"Art!" Doug commands, and the art department rushes over to adjust the plant and the screens according to his wishes. The camera gets moved back in place. Paul and I catch each other's eye across the bustle and we each stick out our tongue at the other, exaggerated lolling tongues with wide eyes followed by warm smiles filled with the history of a thousand intimate incidents. Paul wears a carnelian and brown wood bead bracelet, called a "karma bracelet," that Samantha gave him before the shoot. Paul gets in his chair, holding the clapboard and the script in his lap while he waits. I see that the clapboard is electronic. Several people bustle in the background, making adjustments as instructed by Paul and Doug. They have set up the camera for a shot of the same scene from a different angle, farther back from the plant. They adjust the

screens. The sun is coming out. I realize that if the sun had been out this morning, most of the day's work would not have been necessary.

Jeff hands me a contract from Jack Kulp to get Paul to sign when he has a moment, and an e-mail from Diane about needing a set of keys to the house and a remote for the garage back from us.

We are finally about to do another take. Paul is intent on the monitor, scrutinizing every movement and expression with a sharp, narrow intensity that sees nothing else. I smile.

"Cut!"

"Thank you. Cut," Seth echoes in his walkie-talkie. "Okay guys, get ready for picture…Okay, picture's up, quiet in the house please, quiet all around...okay, roll sound, camera..."

"Marker." A loud clap resounds.

"Action."

A boom mike hovers over the girls' heads. It is still the same scene.

Seth is continuously talking over his walkie-talkie, communicating the proceedings from the core of the action to the rest of the crew on a moment-by-moment basis. "Can I have someone in the art department. Someone in art." He is speaking softly, out of immediate range of the camera.

"And cut."

"Cut. Thank you," Seth repeats. It must not be easy to keep up with what's going on so continuously and communicate it so rapidly like that. He's like some kind of crazy interpreter or sports commentator, translating each action into information for people who aren't there but who are greatly affected by it.

Amber stays at her soundboard in the kitchen. Her soundboard is a technological marvel of a computer screen and keyboard, which she sits poised behind with headphones on, chewing gum. Someone else operates the boom mike at the scene of the action with big headphones on and a utility belt with military-looking elongated fanny packs attached to it.

Marina is saying, "I feel like I need to be talking so I don't notice that she's freaking out at first."

"Let's do it again," Samantha bounces, revving up for another take.

Paul instructs them to improv dialogue leading up to when Samantha falls down in convulsions. It is quite amazing to see this spontaneous conversation arise, as if it's for real, and then the script dialogue suddenly is being enacted by both characters, smoothly, as if it were not the written lines, but part of the improv itself. "Awesome. Good, job, guys," Paul compliments them.

Apparently the latest take was successful, for Seth announces, "Okay guys. Moving on."

William and Martine, the costume designer, are talking in the shutter door den. Martine was reading *The Che Guevara Reader* and William struck up a conversation with her about it. Steve Sprung is suggesting that Paul run through the whole shot because the energy is so good. Paul listens to the sound in the kitchen. Wes is developing film by feel in a little light-proof table-top tent with cloth arm tubes that looks like a piece of equipment used to handle contaminated or radioactive materials in a lab. Doug is setting up the next shot when Jennifer comes in and greets her mom.

"Could you walk through for me?"

I slide my notebook into the huge pocket on the back of my photographers' vest and begin to enact the scene.

Metal tracks run over the rug in the living room. Doug sits on a little cart with wheels that is perched on the metal tracks. Bruce, one of the crew, stands behind him and pushes the cart, slowly and uniformly, down the tracks so Doug can get a moving shot of the plant. They are rehearsing for this dolly shot.

"A little more slowly," Paul coaches from his monitor. "Very good speed..."

They reset the cart to its original position. "Okay, and…dolly..." Paul watches the shot on his monitor. "Back to one." Amber stands behind him, watching. This take is shot without sound, just a visual image of the plant. Steve has his video camera rolling, capturing footage for the documentary of the making of the film. He gets a close up of Paul's face as he runs through a take.

When Paul is satisfied, they move into shooting the same scene, 37, from behind.

"Roll sound."

"37 echo take 1..." Amber records for her own reference.

I manage to locate Jeff and return the completed paperwork to him, then clean up the breakfast leftovers.

William informs me, "It's a very small world!" He's just put two and two together and realized that Teo's mother, Donna, is the owner of Guardino's Gallery on Alberta Street in Portland. William had a very strange experience there seven years ago. He wanted to see if the Gallery would be interested in showing his paintings. One Saturday, accompanied by his soon to be ex-wife, he entered and was greeted by the owner's husband. William introduced himself as a watercolorist, but before he could bring up his paintings, his wife mentioned living in Berkeley. Just then Teo's mom entered the room as William's wife said, "Yes, I left Berkeley nearly thirty years ago after my son, Galan, was born."

"Berkeley? Did you say you two have a son named Galan?" Teo's mom blurted, surprised.

"Oh no, we don't. Galen was my first son with my first husband."

"We're originally from Berkeley and I also have a son named Galan!"

"Really! That's incredible! Mine lives in Canada. He's into animation."

"You're kidding me! So, is mine, though not in Canada. Would you like a cup of tea?"

"That would be great."

As the two women walk to the back room, Donna's husband leans over and tells William, "Better come back another day." William shook his head in baffled agreement and left, alone.

"Quiet, please, 30 seconds of room sound." *What? Did I hear that right?* They began to earnestly prepare to record nothing.

I ask around and find out that these recordings of silence, of ambience, are different than just leaving a blank. They will need lengths of this when they put the film together.

Now they're getting a still shot of the plant. "That was more than enough, right?" Paul checks with Doug. There is always bustling to set up the next scene while the present one is being shot.

"This is the most pressure I've ever been under," Ailee confides, sitting on the back of the sofa that has now been moved out in the hall. She is the program coordinator, the person whom the producer is counting on to make sure all the different aspects of production go smoothly. She is also the guardian of a large loose-leaf binder in which she keeps track of expenses, transportation, sleeping arrangements, basically everything.

As lunch tables were being set up by the side of the house, I spoke with Mike, the neighbor who is friendly with my parents, and asked him what he thought of production. He has been looking on with curiosity at the many people bustling around the usually quiet house next door.

"Is it what you expected? Did you expect it to be this big? Are we okay with the noise level? Feel free to watch."

Mike was glad for the invitation to watch the proceedings. His dog, Beni, whom he loved very much and who had cancer, was put to sleep just yesterday, and the film was a welcome distraction.

We are breaking for lunch, and this is confirmed ubiquitously as Seth's voice, "Half hour for lunch!" is broadcast, echoing on everyone's walkie-talkies.

Over lunch, William, Paul, Mike, Greg and Steve were discussing the nature of a convulsive seizure. Gina is to fall down in convulsions in front of the plant.

"It's silent and they shake." That was the verdict.

"All right. We can cut out the sound from that shot," Paul says, visualizing it and making Spider Man fingers showing the angle from above.

Suddenly, Steve turns to me and asks, "What does Diane look like?"

"Oh, early or mid fifties, blond..."

"I think she just got here."

We are eating under a canopy. Samantha, Marina and Martine are sitting across from me. I am on the far left with Steve next to me and Paul on the far right. Lunch consists of Chinese delivery, lo mein and rice, and chicken and vegetables in a light sauce with egg rolls. I jump up and greet Diane in the garage.

"Oh, hi Diane. Welcome. Is this what you expected?"

She looks a little stunned, or, more accurately, a lot stunned but trying to be diplomatic about it. She is the one ultimately responsible to the owner for the welfare of the house, and the house now approximates a studio, or a garage. Or maybe a crime scene. I try to appear nonchalant. I suddenly realize that she has not even seen the inside of the house yet, and is going to have to.

"Are those cars going to be parked there the whole time? What about the neighbors?"

"We talked to them. They're interested. They come out and watch a while. I asked them to please let me know if we're ever too loud or anything."

"What about all this stuff?" Her eyes dart suspiciously around. "And the trucks, are they staying out there all day?"

She is only concerned about the parking and the storage in the garage. Because that's all she's seen. *Please, don't let her look up.*

"Well...yes, probably," I reluctantly answer. "But everything will be packed up at night. The cars will be down below and the stuff will all be in the garage. It will look like nothing is going on."

Lunch ends and Diane gets drawn into the hustle and bustle. I attend to her, introduce her around and make sure she can see the action when we begin filming again. Diane watches the scene when Gina convulses being filmed from different angles. "No, don't bring your body up from the ground so much, keep it shaky like this." Paul gets down on the floor and shakes rapidly.

Diane's scene is up next. Her props are arranged on the coffee table. In front of her are her real estate loose-leaf binder, a lock box and photos of houses. Diane sits on the sofa and jots down notes.

"Not so quickly walking through, Marina."

They go through a couple takes. "Diane, wait one more beat until you look back down."

The scene goes smoothly. Diane is intelligent and aware and delivers what Paul asks for with little prompting.

I was surprised to see massive amounts of stuff being moved out of the big bedroom. There was no place to put it so it went anywhere but the big bedroom: in the hall, shoved in the hall closet, in the small bedroom. Diane enjoyed her experience, much to my relief, and now wants to come back and watch more another day. She wants to bring her friend Christine and maybe someone else. I follow her around and explain things to her that are being done. She remarks that Steve has such good energy. He mills gently around and captures a wide variety of the action.

I ask Jeff if everything is okay with the neighbors. He tersely motions to me to come with him. He enters a gate two houses down and rings the doorbell. A woman in her sixties

comes to the door. She has had plastic surgery on her face that is visible. This does not flatter the tight-lipped frown that consumes her countenance.

"We would like to apologize for all the noise and commotion here," Jeff says in kindly solicitation, almost as if he were doffing a hat with a refined air.

"I don't understand how they could rent a place out for a commercial venture here," she snapped. "This is a residential area. There were twenty or thirty people here today; my driveway was blocked. I couldn't get out. There was a huge truck here."

"We thought we went through all the proper channels in securing permission and announcing this. We put notices on everybody's door letting them know that this was happening," Jeff attempts to show his respect for the people of the neighborhood.

"Well, there were gardeners and workers here today. It wasn't just your people. They were everywhere, making noise and making a mess."

"We want you to be happy. We do not want to cause you any inconvenience. What can we do to make you happy?" I stated openly.

"I'm not happy and there's nothing you can do. I have to take it up with the Homeowners Association, write them a letter."

"Okay..." Jeff and I glanced at each other beseechingly. "Please don't hesitate to ask us if there's anything we can do."

She glared at us with a distorted expression of dissatisfaction and closed the door in our faces.

"Wow. I guess that's it, huh."

"Yeah. You can't change a person like that. I don't think that's the last we're going to hear from her."

So now we have to shift the angle of our shot in order to stay out of her yard. Not that it will make much difference in matters of endearing us to her. There was no razzmatazz Hollywood mystique we could float for her that would change her mind.

"I wish somebody would take control of where we can and cannot shoot," Doug interjects, annoyed.

So we set up the shot in the driveway of the house in the alcove between us and the forbidden territory, because that is Mike's property and he is glad to be involved. We are

shooting the scene where two neatly dressed kids in white are skipping around with sparklers and Gina drives up in a convertible. Teo and Martine are standing by, encouraging the kids to twirl. Paul models for them and has them run along with him so he can show them what to do, which way to spin.

It is getting to be sunset. Paul takes off his jacket and gives it to the little girl in the white dress. I see him do this and take off my fleece jacket and give it to him, and am now in short sleeves and my photographer's vest. Paul's voice, "action," can be heard over the walkie-talkie Mike is holding up so Samantha can hear it in her car.

"Good twirl! Very good! Over towards your left! Over towards your left!" They are dizzy kids, way over to the right.

"I'm getting a little frustrated with the kids, I'm panning over and they're out of the shot," Doug complains. It is unmistakably dusk now.

I just heard word that Jason, Bryan Singer's assistant, called and says Bryan wants to come and visit the set. I look up and with amazement realize that the light globe on the wooden pole that the grip truck broke backing up alongside the house is mysteriously replaced. Teo grinned like a magician approached about a trick. "I switched it with another one from down there." He points down the hill to the next ring of the terraced landscape.

"You mean you unscrewed one and brought it here?"

"Yeah."

High five.

Next on the agenda is a shot of Gina's shadow through the garage windows of Mike's garage. We are all carrying booklets of stapled half-sized sheets that tell us what we are shooting and when we are shooting it, so we can follow what is going on and know what needs to be done.

Doug is amazing. Under any conditions he is a perfect photographing machine. He may not always be nice about it, but it is not about "nice" when the weather has been bad and the shoot is behind schedule. This morning he confided in me, "I haven't slept a wink." Looking at him work, you could never tell.

It took four or five takes to get what he wanted, but eventually the news spread like a wave over the walkie-talkies, "That's a wrap." The phrase had much more behind it, the feeling of a length of intensely spent time now released, than the light and misplaced clip in *The Exorcist* Paul mocked a couple days before.

Doug approaches Paul to put their heads together about the day's shoot.

"We've shot 1.7 rolls per page," Doug says definitively and gravely. "The budget requires that we shoot 1.3 rolls per page." *How the heck can he know that?*

Paul grins with a slight measure of guilt. "Well, I think some of that is the result of those long shots at the beginning and it won't happen like that all the time."

I can tell he felt like an athlete who has just made a record-breaking pole vault. He jumped and was completely in another consciousness and the next thing he knew, he found himself on the other side of the first day of the shoot, not being able to trace every step of how he got there.

"I'm most happy with those Sally Mann shots," Paul says, "I think we need to eat and figure out what's next."

There is a brief gathering in the muddle of the living room before we disperse for the night. Jeff complimented us all on a great first day, saying we got everything done that we intended to. Paul raised the issue of covering all the carpets thoroughly with cardboard; we can clean them but not afford to replace them. I reiterated that Diane is really sticking her neck out for us, and that the rules in this neighborhood for noise control and proper conduct are absurdly strict.

Paul, Steve and Doug went out to eat and William and I went to Albertson's to get breakfast food for the next morning. William bought some chicken at the deli and ate in the car while I bought provisions for the continental breakfast. When we got back I warmed up some leftover Chinese food and ate while Seth and Michel wandered in and out. Michel is getting up early tomorrow, at 5:30 am, to do yoga before the shoot. Everyone congratulated Seth on coming up with a very workable revised schedule for shooting. While talking to William and I, Michel discovered that William plays Ian.

"I didn't know you were an actor, William. I was very fortunate to take an acting class with Anthony Hopkins. He said, 'You have to know your lines as well as your social security number. So no matter what screaming or chaos happens around you, you know them. And you have to memorize them without emotion or you won't be ready for whatever comes up. You need to read the script over and over and over.'"

In the main bedroom, William, Paul and I all take out our jasper triangles.

"Wait. We have to have a ritual."

"The tetrahedron is the strongest structure on earth," William says. Molecules with a tetrahedral structure are extremely stable. We fit together our triangles to form one.

Then we talk about the first scene, the long shot of the girls discussing the transformed plant, and how it is challenging and how Paul still isn't totally happy with any of the takes. He admits that the improv version had some good stuff in it.

"We're all just totally insane," Paul marvels, staring at us with open windows for eyes. "We push ourselves to the absolute limit and then need help..." The red jasper is the life force, an energizing stone. "So that we can renew ourselves to push ourselves all over again." He smiles wearily, the adrenalin rush he has been running on all day finally spent. "Good night, and thanks for the talk."

I was up before sunrise to get breakfast ready and take a shower. I marveled that I felt refreshed. I then helped to clear a space in the middle of the garage and found Ailee a bandage from the first aid kit on set. "Fuck first aid!" as Gina says in the film, inferring rebellion against safety and convention. I tried to fit in a couple quick interviews on my Marantz recorder as we were preparing to shoot, then got stationed as traffic control while Doug and Paul shot an empty water bottle rolling down the hill.

The next scene on the agenda requires several extras serving as roller bladers to skate around Gina, who walks down the street with a flock of roller bladers, mother and young boys, circling around her. As the roller bladers are being dropped off on the set, the resident who was unhappy with us filming there came out of her house and proceeded to take pictures of all the cars letting off passengers for the fifteen minutes that they were there. I see this and immediately run over.

"Hi Selma, how are you today?"

"I'm fine, but I still don't like it. There were all those cars parked here last night and thirty people here." She doesn't acknowledge the aggressive act of taking pictures of the vehicles unloading passengers, which was within the scope of the prescribed regulations, probably to be masqueraded as something worse before the Homeowner's Association.

"They're not staying here," I tried to assure her, disregarding her terse manner. "And everything will be cleaned up at the end of the day."

"Well, I have workers coming here to do my lawn today, and they are going to park in the driveway."

"Okay, I will let everyone know. Would you like us to move the truck?"

"You can't block this driveway or that one," Selma said, indicating Mike's.

"Oh, yes, we're aware of that. We've been talking to them and they know that if they need anything at all we'll get right on it."

Jeff takes me aside and thanks me once I return.

"Did you see what she was doing?" I implored nervously. "She was taking pictures. She waited, lurked actually, until those cars came and she jumped on it and took pictures. It's seven o'clock in the morning!"

Our heads turn at the sound of a garage door across the street lifting ponderously on its chains and revealing two women, who peer down the street from the shelter of their garage. I run up and greet them with Michel. We discover that the younger woman has a Ph.D. in mathematics and her mom, who must be in her eighties, comes to visit her a couple months out of the year.

"Do you want to be a movie star?" Michel says solicitously to Helen's mom.

"Oh my, at my age?" she flutters her hands and drops her eyes demurely at the flattery.

"Sure, why not?" Michel smiles broadly, showing gleaming rows of white teeth. "Feel free to come over and watch any time. Maybe we'll put you in the movie."

On the same side of the street, our crew is running a cable into a nearby garage. The occupant graciously lets us use his electrical outlets.

A guy comes up to drop off the newspaper as we are still standing there and Michel takes it from him and delivers it to the charmed women himself with a debonair flourish. He is such a showman and knows how to use his looks and jovial gregariousness.

It is not long before they are set up and begin shooting the scene where the girls walk to the pool. Marina is in a black bikini and Samantha is in a sky blue bikini with tropical flowers on it. A crew of nine or ten people are ahead of them, Doug being wheeled back with the camera on a cart, the boom mike hovering above, someone gathering up the electrical cord in a coil as they all shuffle backwards, filming the girls walking forward on their way to the pool. Paul is set up at his monitor about sixty feet away close to Amber and her sound cart, a black screen on a tripod blocking the sun from hitting his monitor screen.

The roller bladers are darting about, skating and skateboarding up and down the alcove driveways. There is a rule against skating in the neighborhood and we can't do anything about it now, but we slide the garage door closed at our house to minimize the mess.

Doug is poised low on his cart as he shoots the backs of the girls walking to the pool. The guy pushing him on the dolly is wearing a t-shirt that says, "Life is a long hard road...why not hit the water?" Underneath that it says, "Ride fast, take chances--Personal Watercraft Racing." He looks like the water sport type, a touch of Lance from *Apocalypse Now.* Ragged people with rolls of colored tape hanging from their belts hover around the camera. Loose-leaf binders are opened like birds' wings, electrical wire snakes over the ground like a network of veins. A large white equipment van is parked on the side of the road, which it shouldn't be, according to the rules.

"Girls, that was a very professional-looking strut," Michel calls out to the actresses during rehearsal.

"That was our 'it's so hot out' walk," Samantha banters back. It is not hot. We are all wearing jackets.

I ran into the camera's field of vision when I went to get Paul a banana and was frantically waved away from a distance. I flattened against the side of a house like a police officer about to fire around a wall at a stakeout.

There are three sets of parents and kids here for the skateboard/bicycle/rollerblading scenes. Paul cordially bounces around and introduces himself to all the kids, shaking their hands. One of the mothers starts snapping pictures when he comes to her kids. Paul is briefly interrupted as Mike Wilson, the neighbor, offers his son and his son's venue as a contact for the nightclub scene. Mike's son is the manager of the Viper Room, a very exclusive L.A. hot spot. Paul is now considering switching locations for the nightclub scenes.

The extras, most of them hyped up on sugar from the Crafty table, are only half under control; they skate up on the lawns and raise an occasional racket, a swarm of bees on blades with a sugar rush. Doug is getting agitated and finally meets with Jeff behind the scenes in the main bedroom, annoyed at the lack of organization he is confronted with.

"We were supposed to have the roller bladers all ready for their scene immediately after the street scene was shot. They have no idea what they're doing. Now we're behind schedule."

"Seth was supposed to coordinate that."

“I can’t set up for the shot if things aren’t ready," his voice rises a notch. "This keeps happening. I told you...”

“All right,” Jeff snaps. “Talk to Seth, okay? I’m doing ten thousand things at once. Seth is supposed to be taking care of that.” Jeff walks briskly off.

Paul and his flock of seagulls have moved to the street behind the back of the house and are just beginning to set up for the scene. We ask the occupants of one of the houses in the shot if we can hang a swing on the tree in their front yard to designate this part of the neighborhood from the part we have already shot since all the houses look the same. There are not supposed to be any swings on the trees because it is against the rules.

“Oh, sure, you can do that. Go right ahead,” says Bonnie, who was a national swimming champion at one time. Now she is in a cast with a broken knee. We are grateful for her ebullience and friendliness. *Well, she’s quite a rebel because hobbling around in casts in the neighborhood is against the rules. Ha ha.*

I had recently learned that the trash laws were violated by a grossly irresponsible Mike one morning, who put out his trash an hour early because he and Linda were going on a trip (God forbid!), and the ever-watchful Selma documented it and filed a complaint against her own neighbor. Trash can only be put out on the curb between certain hours. Mike is the kind of guy that asks the Lord for confirmation that he did the right thing by putting his terminally ill dog to sleep, and then experiences us coming and bringing good energy and entertainment as a divine sign. A real bad neighbor.

The shoot today was on the terrace below the house, on the street. There are bushes lining the patio in back of the house and a concrete rain gutter running down to the street below. Someone had the bright idea of tying a rope to it and people can now hang on to it and shimmy up and down as if they were climbing a mini mountain. I’ve been keeping neighbor relations and belaying food and drink down to those below.

“Oh, perfect timing!” Paul exclaims as I hand him a Balance Bar. “Sometimes it’s not, when I’m nervous or something.”

I helped set up the tables and chairs for lunch in the side yard. The caterer today is a whole foods guy and that makes me happy because I’ll get a vegetarian meal, which is rare. Usually us vegetarians end up eating others’ vegetable side dishes. I slowly become aware that I may be the only person happy about this. Jeff and Ailee are very unhappy.

"You gotta have meat."

"There can't be just one vegetarian meal?" I ask, incredulously.

"The grips and art department are always moving stuff. They're running around constantly doing physical work for hours on end. They are often big, burly guys who have to have their meat."

"Oh, okay," I understand a little better.

Jeff runs off in a flustered huff to get some chicken. He throws a broken walkie-talkie at me as he rushes off. "Can you figure this out and fix it?"

I am still stationed above the shoot, stocking the Crafty table and keeping supplies coming to the crew.

"It's so hard trying to tell people what the movie is about. It's hard to explain," Marina says.

"I tell people it's about the evolution of consciousness..."

"That's a good way to approach it. I never know what to say. You explain it from the point of view of your character, so, it's like, I die," she laughs. "There's too much love and I can't handle it."

"Your consciousness is opened so that the joy and terror in the universe is no longer veiled."

"Yeah, my best friend poisons me," she shrugs her eyebrows and smiles. "You know, it's a good thing you're here because Paul is so accommodating. He'd try to accommodate everybody."

"I know. I'm his Samwise."

She smiles and nods. "Even in acting. He asks how we feel all the time and what we're thinking."

"He's just great. He's a Libra. But you're all Libras, right? You and Paul and Samantha?"

"Jesse too. Jesse and Samantha have the same birthday, October 5."

"Wow, that's wild," I laugh. "Paul I think has five planets in Libra. That's a lot of air sign."

"I think all the time, but in a good way: with my heart, I hope." Paul is a Libra with seven air signs, a whole lot of mental energy.

Marina then relays a story about growing up in the southwest and said that there were lots of lizards, and one day one went up her pants leg and she couldn't get it out and now she's paranoid. What a bizarre and kind of creepy experience.

When lunchtime came around, I found William talking to Michael, the whole foods caterer. They are busy in the kitchen. Apparently, William has been recruited as an assistant cook. On the menu are veggie burgers, potato salad and a special natural fruit punch that Michael boisterously calls "Juicy Nectar." Juicy Nectar was a thick mixture of fresh squeezed juices and spices such as ginger that Michael insisted was totally unique, special and magical. It was very good; it was a healthy smoothie, but apparently to him it was a mystical experience.

"So, what's in this juice?"

"No!" Michael's head snapped in the direction of the question, like a staff sergeant reprimanding an insubordinate private. "It's *not juice*," he spat vehemently. A line from the movie echoed in my head. *The water part is cool...It's not water...* "It's *Juicy Nectar*," Michael savored the words like he was imparting some great truth.

The theatrical nature of this reaction, plus the sexual implications of the name spread around the set like wildfire. "Joosee Nectah!" Michel theatrically called out, with the voice of a New Orleans jazz musician.

When Michel introduced William as someone to help carry the food out to the tables, Michael jumped at the opportunity and basically delegated the remaining preparation to William so he could mingle with the principals. As crewmembers only have half an hour for lunch, the caterers were all warned that their food had to be on the tables, ready to eat, at exactly 12:00 noon. William, checking his watch, mentions this requirement. Michael waves off his concern saying, "My exquisite food must be prepared fresh and savored slowly!" In using only the very best organic ingredients, there no was doubt his food was top notch, but in thirty-five short minutes the crew would descend like a swarm of locusts devouring everything in sight. Some wouldn't even remember what they ate. Michael starts barking orders to William. "The sauce for the potato salad must be mixed with care… No, No! You must gently *lift* the potatoes; don't stir."

William's eyes widen in disbelief when Michael unwraps trays of cold veggie burgers. "We've got to get these into the microwave!"

"My offerings are never microwaved!" Michael retorts, affronted.

William grabs a tray from his hands and shoves them into the microwave. It is now twenty to twelve. Michael goes to retrieve the tray, but William stops his hand with a large pointed fork. Michael scowls at the sacrilege. William was sure this resistance would not go unpunished, somehow. And William hates microwaves.

"Don't you know I'm the chef for a billionaire … his personal cook?" William smiles a hurried approval. After the ding, William retrieves one tray of burgers and dumps them into a basket while sliding another tray in with his other hand. Michael grimaces at William's lack of respect for his living food. He pulls out a cell phone and dials a number. "You know who I just dialed? Ram Dass! Know who he is? We're good buddies. I can call him anytime I want." He holds the phone to William's ear. "Listen! Hear that? That's Ram Dass' voice." William passively listens as a generic message recording inserts "Ram Dass." He didn't have time to be impressed, as another tray of the veggie burgers was ready. Outside the window, the first of the crew was arriving. The clock read 11:59.

Suddenly, Michel comes running in and yells, "William! What in the hell have you been doing? You should've had the food out there by now!"

Michael, dramatically wiping non-existent sweat from his brow, gives Michel a look as if to say, "You just can't get good help these days." Michel pushes William aside and carries the large basket of heated burgers outside. Michael follows immediately with the bowl of potato salad, pauses briefly, and says, "Boy, *you* are in serious trouble!"

That night as William slumped into bed, he observed, "These guys sure know how to play this game a lot better than me."

At lunch, I sit with William, Paul, Samantha, Marina and Michel.

"I keep having this recurring dream of a bear chasing me," Marina was saying.

"Have you read any dream symbolism books?" someone asks her.

"Yeah, but they've been very basic."

"Maybe the bear symbolizes something you're running from," William says.

"I think it may symbolize competition," I recall from my Jungian studies.

"Isn't this lunch amazing?" Michel boasts.

"Yeah, it's great to have the vegetarians be the ones who are catered to," says Marina, the only other vegetarian on the whole crew that I know of. The food is very good.

William begins a running monologue about his confrontation with a Montana grizzly bear while climbing in the Absaroka wilderness. Mesmerized by the thunderous beauty of a waterfall, he violated the bear's territory by accident. When he finally looked up, he was shocked to see a young grizzly standing on the opposite bank, twenty yards away. The bear obviously took this as a direct confrontation. Walking backwards, William beat a hasty retreat. The encounter so shook him up, he went downstream a half-mile before he felt comfortable crossing the stream. By then it had started to rain. To make up for lost time, he walked through the downpour to a campsite on the other side a large basin and ended up that night with bad case of hypothermia. Samantha took out her diary, which showed ink in different colored pens, and started writing in it.

Marina tells Paul, "You're so accommodating, you're really great."

"He's all about love."

Every once in a while we see Selma peeking out of her yard with great suspicion in her puckered scowl. Ailee tells me that she found out that whenever workers come to her house to trim the hedges or repair something, she rolls plastic down on her driveway because others' cars are so dirty and they might leak oil. Also, she's been seen plucking blades of grass with her hands and scrutinizing the height of each blade after her lawn is mowed, pluck, pluck, measure, pluck...wow. So the picture gets a little clearer.

"If you want to, put *that* in your book," Ailee grins.

I was on traffic control duty most of the afternoon. I stood down the street with a walkie-talkie and an orange security vest on and listened to, "picture's up...camera rolling...cut!" The rollerblading kids got restless as the day went on and one in particular, Dominic, was especially hyper from all the candy he ate off the Crafty table and was repeatedly rolling onto people's lawns, but Paul said, "He's smart, though, he follows directions well."

A neighbor peeks out and I go over to greet her. "Do you have permission to have rollerblading here? Did you go through the Homeowner's Association?" I assured her that we went through all the proper channels. *If there is ever a crisis here, a landslide or an earthquake on the order of Hurricane Katrina, these people are all going to sit here and die or completely surrender their fate, all the while reciting, "Yes, but the government will be sending water, food and medical help to us, that's the way it is supposed to be, those are the rules..."*

It turns out that Teo almost killed himself falling down the rain gutter and William said, "Why don't you put up a rope?"

In a moment between shots, William tells Samantha about a couple scenes he suggested for potential use in the film. During the scene where Gina throws towels in the pool, some could land and magically form the Arabic letters for "catalyst," and even though Gina doesn't consciously know Arabic, the characters evoke a powerful revelation. Or there could be a scene where Gina goes into a trance and writes alchemical formulas on the mirror in her bathroom in lipstick. Afterwards, she snaps out of it and is puzzled by their meaning. "Awesome, totally awesome! I love that one." Paul felt fueled by this creative brainstorming.

As the day got late, they set up a contraption called a jib in the neighbor's driveway. Doug could not get it to leverage and bounce like it was supposed to. He was up on a ladder and he had a weight belt hanging from it. The thing stuck out sideways, a pneumatic arm or something that was supposed to allow the camera to pan smoothly down from a height. I handed him up his jacket. It was starting to get cold and the light was fading, and Doug was all about light, absolutely perfect light. The time window for the shot was very small. He had been fooling with the thing for a while. He dropped his hands in tired frustration.

"I'm not totally defeated yet."

He tried hanging the weights and seeing if the camera rolled smoothly on the gizmo. He did a couple takes and on the third, with Marina below in her white summer dress, freezing to death, pretending that it's July and not February, with hair blowing in leaves and wind, Doug closed his eyes, took a deep breath, held his hands together and began descending the ladder facing outward, controlling the camera. Ben Minty, from the art department, said that the fixture that connects the jib to the camera is not the right one.

After four or five takes, Paul is happy. Doug feigns collapse and lets out a long sigh of relief. When I described what Doug was doing to Paul, he said, "Oh my God! I never even saw him walking down face first like that."

Michel jokes in a hoity-toity voice while fixing a run-over corner of lawn for one of the neighbors that we were not responsible for, "What are you doing, beating my grass?"

Despite threatening opposition by selected individuals, more of the neighbors have climbed aboard the film bandwagon. One of the neighbors who lives down the street says that it is a 55+ community. They offered to fill the tires on the dolly cart from a hose in their garage.

"It's so interesting to see the process of making a film. Something is finally happening in this neighborhood. Nothing ever happens here."

We are now back inside, shooting in the kitchen. It is a constant bustle, everywhere I stand I'm eventually in the way for the inside shots. I am reminded of Kerouac writing *On the Road* on a typewriter on the floor in a grungy bathroom with a party going on in the flat, people running in and out to use the toilet and vomiting on the floor.

Despite the chaos, Paul approaches me as his next shot is being set up, stealing a couple minutes together. An aura folds around us that is all of our childhood and history together, that melds us in our own joint consciousness.

"You caused all this," I whisper to him conspiratorially, impishly looking around.

"You know, I don't feel connected to that like I did during *Freak.* I used to like that feeling. It's ego, you know. Now it's more like surrender. It's in motion and it's beyond me."

"Well, Evelyn Underhill says the phases of mystical consciousness begin with an illumination, a 'wow' and a buoyant feeling and a feeling of oneness and connection where everything is high and then it kind of goes away. Other things come in, feelings of responsibility and of knowing how much you don't know. I think you've progressed a level in your art."

"I think so too. I can get back to that 'wow' feeling but I don't think it's correct to do that."

"No, it isn't. It's because you're knowledgeable now, that unitary consciousness was a product of innocent ignorance."

"Yeah, it's amazing how much of being spiritual involves struggle and just trying to be what you are and do what you're called to do. It's amazing what you'll do and what lengths you'll go to in order to just try and express what God made you to be. Making a movie takes my whole life, I've been working constantly for months..."

"I know you have. I know the state of working just to do the bare minimum, which is to unequivocally just be yourself in the world. There seem to be so many factors trying to prevent that kind of turning inward...It is exhausting. It's not good not to be able to take a quick nap when you are totally groggy, and to have to have that compromised state be a part of your life for long periods of time. I feel like having done that has aged me. I know proper rest has healed Dad amazingly, his damaged heart valve works better, the doctor was even surprised."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. I've been in pre-production all September and October because we were going to shoot in November."

"A lot of people are really glad you didn't."

"Yeah, it was too ambitious. I don't feel like I can take a break until the whole movie is shot. We're not done yet. Unless we raise the rest of the money really fast in a couple of weeks...I have to do that and then shoot, then after it's shot and we're editing I can tell Steve, look, I need a day off."

"And go to Disneyland."

Paul smiles with half-closed, contented eyes and laughs softly, nodding slowly and sagely. "And go to Disneyland."

I am trying to focus my eyes, scribbling notes down in my little pad in a strobe light. Well, that's what it feels like to my tired eyes as the lighting department tries to coordinate switching off the set lights with Samantha throwing the light switch in the kitchen as she leaves the room with a bowl of cereal.

"And…action."

Samantha takes her bowl of cereal, flicks the switch and walks down the hall to her bedroom. The set lights are turned off by Tarina, way too late.

"Cut! That was way off."

Mike Lynch comes up to me and asks, over my shoulder, "Is this your first book?"

"Well, I wrote a dissertation that was 287 pages long, but, yes, this is my first book hopefully to be published for the public where I'll be able to tour and lecture and support it."

They try again with the lights. And again. Paul shakes his head.

"Sorry."

They roll once more and get one good take and a thumbs up from Paul.

Seth appears, "Okay, guys! That's a wrap!"

"What?" Teo feigns surprised disbelief.

I am standing in the kitchen. Greg comes in with cardboard to lay on the kitchen floor after the camera crew has moved out, and I am in the way. I shuffle to the living room and sit on a chair. I am half in Doug's way.

"I need to talk to Seth...and eat this." Doug picks up a celery stick. "Anyone seen Seth?"

The food laid out for midday snacks was constantly being moved from one place to another, by me, of course; the kitchen table, the little writing desk in the living room, a folding table on the back patio. People are screaming for Seth, like a wave that is generated at a ball game and spreads.

"Seth! Seth!"

"Maybe he went down to get some food."

"We have to clear all the equipment out of here?"

There are sounds of tape ripping behind me. Ripping sounds in front of me. Seth walks through.

"There's Seth. Who wanted Seth?" I glance around.

"Take that jib and shove it," Mike grins to himself at his own humor.

Mike, the scripty, is sitting slightly behind me in the director's chair, counting takes. "Twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight..."

Paul bounds up to me. "What are you doing now?"

"I have to shop."

"Oh, shopping...Albertsons?"

"Yep."

"Maybe I'll buy my food at Albertsons and we can eat in the back room in private, all in private...yes!" He says this really fast and playfully, going into his hyper-excited mode at the end, throwing his arms over his head like an Olympic champion who has just won a race. "Yesssssss...!"

Tape is ripping under my feet. I have to move.

I try to use my hobbit's size to squeeze myself into a corner and be out of the way, a strategy which is usually pretty effective. It doesn't work, so I walk into the kitchen. Paul is just getting off the phone.

"That was Bryan's assistant Jason. Bryan wants to come to the set on Sunday. He's going to the Academy Awards Sunday night so he might not get the chance, but his assistants definitely want to come so I said, 'Sure, come!' He's busy during the week working on the effects for *Superman.*"

"Hey, Paul, Chris will be here with the dailies soon," Doug spots Paul and reports this new development.

"Really," Paul starts with surprise. "I didn't think he'd have them done yet. Then I'm not leaving."

People start crowding into the kitchen waiting for some organization to develop regarding getting dinner, as if such things just naturally come together by telepathy. Samantha and Marina are waiting for a ride to their hotel.

Samantha, whose heritage is white Russian, starts describing her trip to Moscow. She tells us that everybody there looks like her, everybody has the same face, the same nose, there are many beautiful women, better looking than her. She was struck by the level of poverty there, and told us that she bought the Baltic amber ring she was wearing there. It is a greenish, small oval stone that is set in silver that she wears on her middle finger. It was eleven dollars and the people were astonished that she spent eleven dollars on something like that. "They were like, why would you spend eleven dollars on this?" She taps it. I went to get my little amber ring that William bought for me to show her. She holds it. "Oh, that's gorgeous, wow." She wishes she had bought more amber while she was there. She is still wearing my blue aquamarine crystal necklace that is one of the props in the film. William shows her his root beer quartz necklace and a small meteorite he was carrying around in his pocket.

I left the scene to go to Albertson's to shop for tomorrow's breakfast at about 8:30 pm. I had a hard time picking the coffee, since I don't drink coffee and people have such particular tastes regarding it. When I got back to the house, I was surprised to find Samantha and Marina still there.

"I need to take Paul's car. The girls need a ride to the hotel," Michel rushes me with frantic urgency.

I was taken off guard. *I was gone a long time and they're still here? There's no other car? That's crazy!* I extend my hand slowly with the keys in it.

Right before we went to sleep, Paul bounces on the bed with red jasper in hand. I start talking about Samantha's amber ring and the one William gave me. William, holding up his triangle says, "I feel so Atlantean!"

Last summer William spent a month reading a book on Atlantis, not the New Age kind, but one containing a modern linguistic analysis of Plato's *Timaeus* which located Atlantis'

capital, Basileia –the legendary *City of Gold*– in Jutland or modern day Denmark. Further philological evidence suggested the buildings weren't made of gold, but had walls covered with a lacquer made from fused amber, or what they called "Orichalc." He said he felt Samantha's ancient roots reached back to this region where amber's value was greater than gold. This wasn't as far fetched as it might sound because before the rise of the modern Soviet Union, what was known as Russia included these Baltic States and their culturally related civilizations dating back to 12,000 years BC. Who knows what archaic wisdom lurks there? Wide-eyed we all touch our jasper triangles to form a tetrahedron again.

"The sacred Tetrahdron! The underlying structure of both crystals and organic, living matter," says William, embodying the wise sage.

"I love this little triangle-touching ritual. We're two-dimensional separately and three-dimensional together," says the Director.

"Hey, guys! We really need to hustle on this first shot. We're mimicking the exterior we shot last night. We need to be rolling by about 6:15," Seth broadcasts. He means 6:15 *am*.

William is sitting at a courtyard table signing out walkie-talkies. His little blender contains a lime green spirulina shake. Under a straw hat he's smiling a big "good morning" as people rush to pick up their walkie-talkies. He is a morning person, and likes the crisp air. I'm busy moving food to an outside table for those who have to grab their breakfast on the run.

The first two shots are of the exterior of the house and then of a neighbor's yard. A neighbor's garage door starts sliding open. Anything can walk out, an ally or a monster.

"Is someone from production going to go and be nice?" Doug queried. Ailee, Michel and I walk over.

"Good morning."

"Where's my newspaper?" The neighbor is a heavyset man with a bulbous nose. He is standing there, unselfconsciously, in his bathrobe.

"I'll hand-deliver it to you when it arrives," Michel graciously offers.

"It came at 5:15," the man said, surveying the ground past us, the search for his paper of much higher interest than us or the film crew and its proceedings.

"Oh, here it is," Ailee goes to retrieve it.

"We spoke with Bonnie about using your tree," I offer, placatingly, in advance.

"I don't care." The man is already casually scanning his paper.

"We're only going to be here another ten minutes," I continue.

"I don't care."

There are leaves strewn over his yard that we put there. The man didn't seem to notice them. He turned and walked back inside with his newspaper.

We all looked at each other incredulously. "Well...you never know," Ailee mused. "You end up either being too polite or not polite enough."

Mike, the scripty, is busy writing down each shot and what happened and the time it occurred. Paul took a moment to sneak in a call to Mom and Dad. The call was a short one. "Gotta go. There's another shot."

A garage door across the street slides open and a woman gets in a silver BMW and drives off waving. It is 7:45 am.

The next shot is of a bike and a swing in the neighbor's front yard, a marker that they are using to distinguish this front yard from all the others. Paul gets on the bike and rides the hundred or so feet to our house. The camera people are huddled in an animated conversation discussing the shadows.

At the house the grips are securing a huge white tarp-like screen across the u-shaped courtyard on the roof with metal rods and sandbags. Bougainvillea is added to the white wall to moderate the blaring sunlight. People scrabble on the roof and work on the wall of the courtyard, tromping around with belts laden with tools and colored tape. A man from All American Doors and Windows approaches us and asks for directions to Ariana Lane. Nobody knows where it is. His cell phone rings and he gets directions. It would be hard to give anyone directions around here because everything looks the same. He climbs down the gutter and drives off in his truck.

The time-lapse photo area set up on the back patio to shoot the sunset last night is being dismantled. Now a man has come to mow the lawn. There is a set time he is assigned to do it. We have to move tables off the lawn for him.

"He's going to mow! Clear everything off!" Jeff broadcasts.

I move the food once again, for the third time this morning including setting it up, then start moving props out of the way. The crew is setting up in the kitchen now and rehearsals have begun. White screen cloth is everywhere, covering the kitchen walls to mediate the light. Sitting

on one of the Panavision metal filter boxes, as I am jotting notes, Wes comes over, fanny pack with tape and other equipment hanging from his waist, and needs the box I'm sitting on. I move again.

No sooner am I marginally resettled than I find myself standing in for the kitchen scene. White and black tarps hang from racks on two of the walls. This place that was once decorated with imported English furniture has now become a scene out of *E.T.*, where they quarantined the house in a plastic bubble and men in full astronaut-looking sterile suits lope about in what has become an alien landscape in the middle of an ordinary neighborhood. The room more closely approximates a laboratory than an upper middle class kitchen. Just a few weeks ago, my mom was diligently picking up crumbs off the floor and wiping off the stove with a sponge, making sure everything was just right. There is nothing right now. It looks like a serious remodel is going on, or maybe a demolition. Light meters are clicked by my face and bustle is everywhere around me in the cramped space, made smaller by all the equipment, as I stand there like a stunned statue. Large industrial-looking lights with colored cellophane mounted on stands are turned on behind the screen, on the counter itself and laid out on the floor, pointing upward. A fuzzy boom mike hovers above like an alien predator.

"Put it on flicker-free," a voice says behind me, presumably Doug. "The hot spot is right here. Move to the left.

"I need something done to that wall out there." People scramble out and immediately begin to hang plants in the courtyard.

"Okay, Maria, open the refrigerator. Actually, the freezer." They can't get a good shot of the refrigerator half so they moved all the stuff in the refrigerator to the freezer half, but no one will notice in the movie. As I go to open it, I see that a light is propped in there too.

"Stand on your mark." The floor is marked with green tape. "Someone from the art department, we need to move the refrigerator six inches to the left at an angle." People, like worker bees, swarm in and move it.

"Maria, open the door." Doug pauses to look into the camera. "It needs to be moved an inch back." On cue, the fridge is slid back a minute distance.

"Okay, open the door...spin your body around to the right. Okay."

The whole process takes about half an hour. People on walkie-talkies buzz in the kitchen and in the courtyard, constantly trading detailed technical lighting information.

Jeff bounds in, looking frazzled, eyes darting around. "Maria, I need your help with the cars outside."

I am sitting at the table, tracing my hand on a piece of paper, imitating Gina's action.

"Are you done with me, Doug?"

"No!"

"Sorry," Jeff sprints out.

Samantha and Marina finally come in to take over. "Team one! Let's have team one, please!"

"Isn't that fun?" Samantha sparkles, eyeing me tracing my hand. "I could do that all day!"

"All right guys, rehearsal's up! Quiet on the set and in the house!" Seth hovers around, walkie-talkie in hand.

"And…action...Marina, you should be a little more...leaning down...The whole scene a little lower...yeah." Paul scrutinizes the scene carefully. He asks her to minutely alter her position two or three times. Paul said to me once, "Cinema is a re-creation of the details of life."

"Maria, could you help me get the Crafty table set up. I know you are doing breakfast and I am doing Crafty, but I've had so much to do and I'm behind," Ailee looks imploringly at me. I set off at almost a run, pull down some plates and a table cloth and begin setting up the Crafty snacks out on deck. Ailee comes out to help, thanking me again. She had just come from buying more snacks.

"You know, it was really weird, I ran into this woman in the grocery store and she saw me buying all this food and asked, 'Are you having a party?' and I said, 'No, we're making a film,' and she looked kind of horrified and, like, almost backed away from me and then she asked, 'Is it a porno?' It was really weird because *that's not the first time someone asked me that* so I said, 'No, it isn't. I can't figure out why people keep asking me that,' and she said, 'Oh, there's a warning going around because someone rented a house around here and they made a porno in four days.'"

"The trash is becoming a problem."

"We'll take care of it. We'll dump it at Albertson's."

"I think we should take it to a dump and pay. I'm coming back here next year and my parents are renting this house again. We don't want to get caught dumping our trash somewhere weird."

"Maybe we can ask the Chinese place to take it. They're catering lunch and there will be a lot of their trash. We'll use them again and they know it so they'll want to keep us happy given the volume we're buying," Jeff figures.

"This is a three quarter million dollar house. We need to act with decorum."

I stare at the pile of dark green trash bags accumulating in the courtyard. Meanwhile, the crew has finished shooting Jennifer at the refrigerator scene from different angles. The camera, once in the corner on a cart is now on the table for a close up of Gina's hand. Paul flips through his Sally Mann photography book for inspiration. I move to set food up on the back deck. I bring Paul Cheez-Its in a Styrofoam cup and a bottle of water. I learn from Ailee that apparently Marcia from the Homeowner's Association stopped by this morning and said people were complaining about the rollerblading. Marcia was graciously assured that there would be no more rollerblading or other terrorist activities and that we will be quiet, obedient, and a completely minuscule and benign presence forevermore.

Lunch was Chinese food from the restaurant down the hill, a nice mixture of meat and vegetarian options. Afterward, all of our stuff got moved out of the bedroom and into the hall closet and whatever corner something could be crammed into. I resumed my stand-in duties in the kitchen for both Jennifer's and Gina's places at the table, answering a shout for "team two" by coming running. The lighting was further adjusted in a flurry of technical language. Then, finally, "bring team one in here!"

"Uh oh," I turn at the sound of Ailee's voice. We begin to walk around the house assessing minor damage. "The location for the fire hydrant scene is right outside Selma's house. Obviously, it has to be moved."

This is the scene where Mark, Gina's brother, played by Jesse Eisenberg, crashes his car into a fire hydrant while racing in the street and water spurts up all over the place. I shudder as I picture Selma calling the police. This scene is re-scheduled to be shot as the first scene on the second half of Sunday's shoot. If, at any point during this production, we are shut down, everything will be lost. We do not have the funds to relocate, reschedule and re-shoot any of the footage. We do not have the funds to shoot the second half of the movie at all.

Amber grew up in Hawaii. She has a young son named Brian, who sounds like quite a rowdy little tyke.

"He's being a brat. He's usually really good but this week he's a brat."

"Does he know you're going to be away for a while?"

"Yes."

"That's probably why."

She shows us a picture of a cute, slightly punkish, rowdy-looking little six-year-old tyke.

"How can you not love that face? He does his own hair. He wants to be a rock star."

His hair has gel in it so that it is sticking up and spiky, like Billy Idol. I'm not surprised that the kid wants to be a rock star when I look at his chain-smoking, Janis Joplin-voiced, Jaegermeister-swigging blond, button-nosed mother.

"He's adorable." The kid has a lot of personality for six, a lot of sass. Again, it is obvious where he gets that from.

"He's just discovered Jimi Hendrix." Smart kid, I think to myself. And, apparently, he is. Amber says he is already studying geometry in Chicago with her ex-husband. She sees Brian on her vacation time.

Michel is sitting nearby, giving the weather report he has pulled up on his cell phone to whoever is listening. Amber is gabbing on, off on another topic, "I had this job where I was making $1,100 a day and had a second and third assistant. Then they took away my third assistant and dropped my pay to $250 a day..."

Outside they are shooting Marina walking down the street in her white dress with a gentle, contemplative look on her face, awash in the sensuality of feeling the wind on her arms and body. Leaves, which were brought in as props, are blown into the scene by a big fan and Marina's hair blows softly in the breeze. A sprinkler is going on the lawn to her right.

Paul asks for another take. "Are you aware of that sort of lens flare?"

"Really? I'm using a diffusion filter now."

There's a lot of bustle with the fan and the crew around a very subtle scene. After Paul was satisfied I got called to stand-in for a scene in Jennifer's room. They are lighting through the blinds with a mirror outside reflecting the sunlight into the room. A dresser is decorated with girlie jewelry and a subdued tie-dye tapestry with black fringe is draped over it. Three posters;

one of a shark, one of an Andy Warhol-like rat in four frames, two on top and two below, called "Ricky Rat," and one of a cartoonish girl on the beach holding a beer are on the wall amongst photos of beach scenes and a written note tacked here and there.

"I'm not a fan of the Asian blind pattern, can you raise the blind a couple inches?" Tarina responds to Doug's direction. The blind pattern is only showing about six inches on the wall and the bottom of the wall is all in sunlight. I walk in, shut the door, go to the bed and get on it. Doug has his professional, objective eye trained on me; I am an object that catches light in a certain way, which Doug has very distinct opinions about. He knows what he wants and communicates it quickly so that the shot can be done before the lighting changes.

The next shot is out in the back yard again. William is praising Paul to Mike, the next door neighbor. "Paul is very good. He knows what he wants and plans out every detail." William gets called away to replace a dead walkie-talkie battery, a "brick."

Meanwhile, in Jennifer's bedroom, Teo fills little vials with flat Coca Cola and puts black rubber stoppers in them. They shoot the scene where Jennifer comes home, goes to her bed, takes out Gina's vial, drinks it, and calls Gina on her cell phone to tell her she's taken the potion.

"Cut!"

"Plane over the line!" Amber yells from the closed-in living room.

"Plane over the line!" Seth yells back to Paul.

"Over the line?" Paul looks up. "Ugh," he draws his hands down over his face. He is getting tired. "You know what, I'm all right," he decides, and everyone starts setting up for the next scene.

People mill about, furniture is strewn astray. White and chrome boxes of all shapes and sizes that say "Concept" and "Panavision" are scattered everywhere, dozens of them, with black handles that fold out of the top to carry them. Airbeds are propped up by the fireplace; sleeping bags draped over them. The cardboard on the floors is getting worn and torn, all odd shapes held together with blue electrical tape. The proper English decor dull beige curtains are now replaced in the living room. Lighting screens are carried through by grips, filing one after the other in the cluttered space. Electrical cords, thick ones, wind like snakes over the floor. The portable silver and black darkroom tent has its arms folded together like a monk in prayer. Giggling filters through from the sound station set up in the room next door.

What a strange world, I think, noticing the slanting light, aware that there is always someone passing through. I feel like I am in a weird bubble in this neighborhood where something is actually happening. A sudden vision of a gray drone of ants going to and from work and to the myriad of stores around here and maybe to the golf course and back popped into my mind's eye, with this colorful little patch of filmmaking creativity splotched in the middle of it like an animated Jackson Pollock painting. Somehow, this whole film crew managed to converge here, chose to do this instead of those other things, and are managing to survive. I shook my head, I am tired, dark circles under my eyes, rumpled, unwashed hair. I'm sure some of the supposed drones are happy, or at least content, and this artistic chaos would be a tragedy for them and how they wish their world in their million-dollar neighborhood to be. Life choices are easier when you can be happy that way. The world is suspended, I exist and am drawn by the future, I am camping in a zone that is taxing and inviting, chaotic and miraculous. William walks over and feeds me a strawberry.

The last shot of the day is in Jennifer's room, a still shot of the posters on her wall. The bed is gone and the room is filled with bright light.

"A good day," Paul surfaces and gives me a big, long hug while people walk by us in and out of the kitchen.

There were dailies last night, raw developed footage of the day's shoot, and there are dailies ready again tonight. William and I went to pick up the next day's breakfast and Paul eagerly motioned us over when we got back. Ailee took Paul's car to drive the actresses back to the hotel.

"Look at this, Maria, isn't this great?" Paul is riveted in front of the television, watching a DVD of the dailies from yesterday.

"Wow. Look how smooth that is."

The jib swooped down from on high and panned by Marina and off to the right.

"Oh my God, you should have seen Doug walking down that ladder!"

"My legs were sore for two hours afterward," Doug piped in.

Mike Lynch noted down the shots Paul commented on liking for future reference. Mike seems very attentive to Paul, always wanting to step in and fill a role required around him and the central creative hub. "A butt shot. Doug is a fan of butt shots. Now look, the POV."

Paul didn't like the rollerblade circle shots but did like the one where they swooped by as Gina was in motion. It was fascinating to see the reality of a set with all the controlled chaos involved and the actors moving around in a living room or walking down the street. The actor looks so ordinary while watching the shot live, and I realized this is so because the point of view of you standing there and watching them, even surrounded by camera and crew, is ordinary. When your point of view is a swooping down from above, even without sound and with little numbers running along the bottom of the screen, the scene is somehow taken to a level that makes it super human. Any POV that distances you from your own (and when they are strung together scene by scene into a whole story you experience as a movie, you are further transported into another realm) and gives you the power to have a whole experience without leaving your chair, that experience, as well as the actors in it, become deified. Not blatantly, but on a subtle psychological level that is opened because you are allowed to feel and experience through the actors a story or sequence intimately as your own.

Paul stares at the wall in Jennifer's bedroom after the dailies have finished being viewed. "Look at that." William and I look in the direction he indicates, which is towards Jennifer's posters. "That's so bizarre. A mouse, a shark and a girl. What was I thinking?" There is something a little disconcerting about bringing into the world what is in your head. Having the fruits of your creativity out in the world for others to see is a little like it would be if your daydreams or fantasies were shown in Technicolor on the walls. It is no longer just you, but exposed for others to see, experience and judge.

"Marina did a good tripping out. I had her crying and panting. At first she was doing it low and then I was like, 'more, more.'" Paul broke into a satisfied grin. "And I shot this yesterday, you should have seen it. I had Samantha do exactly that, her hands, her face, everything." Paul is referring to the Sally Mann photo of Sally's daughter, Virginia, in bed with different layers of covers artistically placed on her and her hair splayed out above her like a fan. *I've been carting that Sally Mann book around for his reference whenever he had a fancy for it. Little do people know…*

Doug comes in with a somewhat official air like he has just become sure of an important development.

"Paul, you should know that we are still using an average of 1.7 instead of the 1.3 rolls of film we have budgeted per shoot. Sixty-five rolls of film is not going to be enough; eighty-five

is more reasonable for a low budget film, especially one as artistic as this one. I didn't think we had enough film all along and I told Jeff but somehow we never adjusted because other things just kept coming up."

Paul paused for one grave beat, "Wow. I realize now what a luxury *Freak* was. This is totally insane."

"We're booking through this. I'm glad, I think we are doing well, but there's just so much emphasis on excellence we can realistically allow."

Paul solemnly and silently gives his assent. The trust between Paul and Doug is palpable in the moment. Doug turns to leave but Paul stops him.

"Oh, and we've decided to relocate the fire hydrant shoot outside of Homeowner's Association territory to avoid any more complaints. We're doing it about a half mile from here but...we only have half a permit. We can't afford the whole permit. We have permission to shoot but not to spray water."

When I went to brush my teeth, Teo and Minty were still working on Gina's room, moving things around and setting up props. It is well after dinnertime, and I am a little surprised. "Wow! That looks cool, I like that." I indicate a round mirror on the wall at the head of the bed surrounded by little red, square, tile-like mirrors.

"It's like Mars, the red planet," Teo said.

Minty holds up a yellow crescent moon next to it.

"Nice. You have a little symbolism going on there. I like it." They are working until 11:30 tonight. I pause in a moment of respect. Anyone who does that deserves meat if they want it.

Paul, William and I take a moment to touch our jasper triangles. I was writing by flashlight after the lights were turned off because I wasn't done. *What a luxury it would be to have a night table,* I think, as I drift off to sleep.

Paul and Doug are setting off to scope out the new location for the fire hydrant scene. It is Friday, March 3, the fourth day into the shoot.

"Isn't it weird being here with all this going on after being here with Mom and Dad?" Paul asks me in the kitchen. The oval kitchen table has now been exchanged for a durable plastic, white, long, rectangular folding table used sometimes in offices or for picnics. Doug sits

at it with his shot book open. The *Life on Mars* office printer and computer sit on the far end near the laundry machines, along with an empty can of 7UP and some beer bottle tops. I prepare breakfast, putting the coffee on first.

"Yeah, it's weird. I'm kind of glad they're not seeing this. It's no different than Hurricane Katrina for them, I'm sure." Paul laughs, acknowledging the element of truth in the statement. "It reminds me of the time we went to the Space Needle in Seattle as tourists and then three days later went to the *Austin Powers 2* wrap party and the place was totally transformed, fur on the walls, a band on every floor..."

William tells Paul, "I've been talking to Mike. I haven't asked him for money for the film but I've told him we're going with independent investors and that *Freak* won an award."

I step outside. Brown, black and blue trash receptacles are everywhere, lining the street. A light bulb of an idea flashes in my head.

"Is today trash day?" I ask Paul.

"Yes."

"We should take ours out."

"Jeff is already on it."

I start gathering up the trash. "We should try and put trash in everybody's receptacles that aren't already full."

"Great idea. Jeff, did you hear that?"

"I'm on it." Jeff's reaction time was about a half a second.

Jeff and I scramble around, gathering up the trash. I run out and stuff some in the immediate neighbor's cans, passing over Selma's house, of course. Jeff is running down the street with a trash bag in each hand, furtively looking around and stuffing cans farther away.

The trash truck rounds the corner. Jeff runs ahead with the truck barreling straight on, an upscale Laguna Mad Max confronting the renegade enemy in a showdown. I'm doing the same on the other side of the street. A neighbor comes out of his house down the road. Jeff and I turn around, an abrupt about face, trying not to look too guilty. We beg the trash people to take the last couple bags that didn't fit in our cans, and they toss them in. The truck drives away. Jeff and I exchange a high five. The crew is just beginning to arrive.

Samantha has a headache and requests Tylenol. I duck out in the rain with William to go to Albertsons. I drop William off at Diedrich Coffee down the hill with my laptop so he can check his e-mail, then scoot across the street from Albertsons and fill Paul's car with gas. Then I picked William up from Diedrich's and dropped him off at the house so he wouldn't have to walk back up from the street parking we use outside the neighborhood.

Paul invited me to watch the scenes filmed in Gina's bedroom. Both Samantha and Marina are miked for the scenes. This means that they are wearing small microphones and battery packs under their clothing rather than relying on a boom mike to record sound. Samantha is on the bed, flipping through comic books, and Marina is on the floor. Paul asks for roots and herbs.

"Can I get some of those roots and herbs for this scene?"

They are brought in.

"Let me see...sprinkle them there. Do you have anything green?"

Marina has a mortar and pestle in front of her. The herbs are arranged on one of the comic books and in the mortar and pestle. Aspirin and Vitamin C tablets are placed with them.

Doug is busy lighting the scene. Because of the rain, it is more difficult. A large horizontal light with black blinders--blinders like you might see on a horse--is brought in and set up. Mike, the script supervisor, is in the closet sitting on a folding chair. Paul's monitor is in the closet, facing out, and he sits on a white office chair. White and pink curtains are in the window and are being carefully adjusted. A fake sun in the form of a bright spotlight streams in.

Doug's voice draws several people's attention. "I'm seeing Marina's sound cord." Ben runs over to try and get it hidden. Mike plays with his stopwatch in the closet.

"Can someone move that computer you moved earlier? Does it tip up? Rotate it counter clockwise..."

"Okay, lock down, rehearsing..." This means that all unnecessary bustle must stop in preparation for shooting.

"And...action..." Paul stares intently at his monitor. Gina rips pages out of the comic books and Jennifer grinds herbs in her mortar and pestle while they talk about boys. "Cut. Okay, you did great."

Paul goes over and looks through the camera, then takes his post back at the monitor and munches on some Wheat Thins I brought him in a red plastic cup.

"Paul, do you want an apple box?"

"No, I'm okay."

The rug where Marina's legs are is marked with green tape. Rectangles of black cloth used to block out light are positioned to the side according to Doug's specific instructions. A couple guys are outside in the pouring rain setting up a black cloth screen with plastic wrap over it. It flops down and the plastic flaps around.

"The thing has to be angled this way," Doug motions horizontally, "or this way. You can't have drips coming off of it."

"I can go on the roof and put the 4x8 off the back of it."

The boom mike comes out; too many cords were seen. Marina and Samantha leave the set for the time being.

"Amber! The issue of the rain is still being dealt with!" Mike addresses the boom mike with gray fur on it, which is used to change the quality of the sound. A moment later Amber comes in.

Marina and Samantha return. Paul lounges on the bed and flips through comics with them.

I walked into the kitchen and got roped into setting up the Crafty snacks.

"Quiet on the set!" Looks like they finally got the lighting straightened out. Two more takes immediately follow the first one.

"We're going again!"

Guys are running around without shoes and socks and shirts. Clothes dry in the dryer.

"Going again, real quick...All right guys, picture's up. Quiet on set!" Seth barks.

"Quiet on set!" Greg echoes.

"Cut!" breaks the period of silence that follows.

The rain begins to slow down a little, then decides to resume its previous pummeling downpour.

Paul comes in and immediately spots me. "You're a stand-in," he declares. I make a goofy face at him. He answers me immediately with an equally ridiculously childish face.

"Look in the mirror...now look a little to your right..." A spotlight with black flaps is being adjusted.

"All right, we're going to get a room tone!"

"All right...everybody settle..."

"Call out, 'this is room tone for scene 18,' please" Amber's disembodied voice requests. The odd custom of recording silence in a room to be plugged into the film as it is being edited together later is repeated. Apparently, every room sounds a little different even though no sound is being recorded.

Ailee has been nagging at William to help out with physical labor such as taking out trash, moving furniture, taping cardboard to floors and stocking food. William wants to help in any way he can because we are obviously short-handed, but he's not signed on as a production assistant, which is a job for twenty-somethings. Paul asked him to come and be an acting consultant for key sets and create original art as directed. Paul always felt he was more like a VIP and an elder with real knowledge of Alchemy. Unfortunately, Paul never had the time to introduce him to the rest of the crew as such. This caused a lot of confusion about his role and led to growing ill will towards him. Also, William just naturally smiles a lot. For people trying to get by on three hours of sleep, too much smiling had to mean you were slacking.

I said to William, "This is starting to piss me off, come with me," and brought a folding chair to the den room, unfolded it, and said, "sit down."

The production office has been moved to the kitchen. It is a big white table where Ailee, Jeff and a third person can sit. Computers, a printer, and paperwork litter the space.

"You're a wild girl," William says to Amber.

"I try my best," she grins, chewing gum.

We briefly exchange stories about really wild people we know. Amber tells us about a friend of hers who used to be a surgeon who got body piercing in his shoulders and balls inserted in his forehead. Normally, that would be rather disturbing, but instead we tell her about this Magus we know in Portland who had horns embedded in his forehead. It was hard finding someone to do the surgery, for it involved making two slits just above his temples and having six inch tapered rods pushed in to stretch the skin. Later, these were removed and larger, ribbed rods permanently inserted. After nine months, he had diabolical horns running up each side of his forehead. He said he did this in gratitude for the appearance of a Spirit he had conjured. It's always fascinating to meet people who make such drastic decisions about their bodies, especially when it alters their relationship to society.

The next scene is Gina coming into the bedroom and sitting in front of the globe and transmitting her alchemical wizardry to the world via meditation. As I stand in, a tape measure comes right up to my face and is strung all the way to the camera, measuring the distance.

After team one was called in I left the kitchen and found out that Jesse Eisenberg had arrived.

"Hi Jesse!"

"Hi Maria!" He gets up and gives me a hug. "Wow, I haven't seen you in, what, five years?"

"Yeah, I guess so. It doesn't seem like it's been that long."

"Wow, your mannerisms are so much like your brother's it's uncanny."

Mike Lynch comes over and stands by us. "You both have the same life in your actions."

"It's because we both are excited about what we're doing and engaged with people."

"Yeah, it's weird when two people grow up together, what similarities they acquire."

"I don't usually think about it until somebody sees Paul and me together and thinks we're twins. It happens all the time. We stay so intimately engaged with each other's lives; we're always in sync. He loves what he's doing and I'm really glad to be here sharing the experience."

Jesse does a double take, "You really like being on the set?" He is honestly puzzled by my words and his quizzical look requests further confirmation he heard me right.

"Sure, yes."

"Why?"

"Well, because it's the process of Paul's creativity actually happening moment by moment. I've seen this whole process from the gestation of the idea to the writing of the script and how it is moving from inside of his head to outside in the world. And now, as other people come on board to bring the script into embodied reality, it's like the magic of being at the genesis of a new world."

Jesse's appalled confusion abated some. "I guess I understand that. I hate being on set."

"But you're treated well, aren't you?"

"In some ways, you can say that. But I even feel bad about that, because I know that I'm there because I come from a rich family and had the opportunity, it wasn't me, really, it's all kind of a facade. I mean, I was talking to this actress who has a college degree and she gave up her career path to pursue acting, and I said, 'Why would you do that. I expect people to be here

because they can't do anything else. Why would an intelligent person be here and put up with this?' There's always such mire and politics and stress, it's actually really bleak."

"Well, that actually makes a lot of sense and you see through a lot and have been on so many sets. But, for me, this is Paul's film, it's like a monumental family event and for me, this is all new and that overrides those other things."

I'm called away to stand in again, this time for a different POV of the same globe scene. Doug is saying, "Where's sound?"

"I thought you didn't want them in here."

"They get kicked out for one rehearsal and now they need an invitation?" he barks, clearly miffed. Sound sheepishly slinks back in, stressed and uncomfortable, unsure of how to negotiate their presence.

Just before lunch, during the last two minutes, Doug was about to get up and Paul said, "Can you roll on my sister for two seconds just for fun?"

"Yeah, sure," said Doug, visibly amused.

"Okay, Maria, do something cool, anything you want."

"Okay." I sit down in front of the globe.

"And...action!"

"Aaaah...what's this?" I say. I find myself suddenly in front of the camera. "Hmmm...this is the planet we live on...wow." I spin the globe, maniacally staring at the camera. "Getting dizzy?" I grin, get up and walk off screen, leaving the globe spinning.

Paul bounces with joy. "I'll make sure Steve puts that in the documentary."

As lunchtime approaches, William is in the kitchen again helping Michael, the personal chef of a billionaire. On the menu is rice pasta with a robust sauce, an elaborate gourmet salad garnished with colorful flowers, and aromatic garlic bread. Jesse offers to help me and to help William and Michael set up the tables to be ready for the ravenous crew. I told him to sit down and relax, knowing he was going to be shooting immediately after lunch.

Michael offered us tea with a strong cinnamon taste, like Red Hot alcohol or cinnamon fireball candy. Jesse liked it.

"Wow. This is good."

"Well, who are *you* anyway?" Michael prodded, with a swagger.

"Thank you for being aggressive," Jesse replied.

It was obvious Jesse spent many years on sets and accepted being a part of the grind and grit of it. The whole Hollywood facade pains him because everywhere he looks there are only shadows and ghosts. He just wants some real communication and interaction beyond the wasteland of exaggerated accomplishments and empty, triple superlatives. Jesse is the only veteran actor on the set with the possible exception of Dylan Kussman, who plays Mick, the disgruntled firebrand in the community in the woods to be filmed later. Dylan has drifted away from Hollywood to the east coast where he can concentrate on writing and producing his own stage plays. For most people here, this film is just an obstacle to be surmounted, a means to get a credit on another project, to extend their portfolio; a job to get through as best you can.

I dart back to Gina's room to stand in some more. I almost get nailed with several lighting stands barreling towards me like lances. "Hot point! Hot point!"

As soon as I had a moment, I grabbed Steve Sprung's video camera and walked around filming the natural action and the mess on the set. Steve left it so that anyone could pick it up and get footage. Got a good close up of Doug's eye, "The Eye," through a forest of surrounding equipment as he sat at the camera. I captured Paul intensely concentrating on his monitor.

As I was circulating around, I filmed Jesse, Martine and Marina in Jennifer's bedroom as Marina was talking about the crystals Gina wears and saying how she loves them. I turned the camera on Jesse.

"So, what do you think of *Life on Mars*? Do you have an interpretation of the script?"

"Not really," he answers impassively. "I don't trust my own opinion...Can I turn the table?" He takes the camera. "What is your interpretation of *Life on Mars*?"

"Well, I think Paul did something truly creative here. It's not clear whether Gina is an alien or just affiliated with aliens, but she is a genius that devises a plan to evolve human consciousness. The story is not plot-driven, but hangs together as she adapts her plan using chemistry, then physics, then meditation. She experiments first on plants, then crystals, then people, and it comes to light that the full blaze of Divine Love that Rumi talks about in his poetry, is too much for most people to take. We feel the world's pain as we open our heart to others. Not just the ones we see here, but those across galaxies who we will never meet. You know how many spiritual traditions say that matter is solidified light? Well, here Paul creatively uses the symbolism of water instead. In his film we are not light, but *water*, see? At the end when Gina succeeds and all the people on Earth disappear, it begins raining on a parched alien

planet. We have become water again; our true, pure form, and through that miraculous transfiguration we arrive home again with the aliens, which are *gods*. We have returned to the Godhead! Isn't that great?"

I beam happily and retrieve the camera. "Marina, is this the messiest set you've ever seen?"

She laughed, "Pan over there." I whirled the camera around and shot the mess on the bed.

I handed the camera quickly to William as I was called to stand in. The shot is a different POV of the globe scene.

William stays and falls into a deep discussion with Jesse about the literature he is reading in college. Jesse is stressed. He's determined to finish his assignment, but his hectic schedule makes it difficult. William's first major in college forty years ago was philosophy. Jesse shows him his reading list. William smiles as he remembers reading them all. Some things don't change. Jesse is amazed by William's insight into and analysis of the material. "I've heard Paul tell lots of amazing stories about you. You're exactly as he described."

William shares stories about what it was like being a poor kid from Cincinnati discovering philosophers like Paul Tillich and Albert Camus. Jesse continues to do his homework, asking William specific questions about Rousseau's *The Social Contract*. "I don't understand what he means by sovereignty."

Quoting Rousseau, William says, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." They now are both attentive and alive, the set having receded into the background. "Civilization corrupts man's natural *amour de soi*. We start out loving ourselves, not in a selfish way, but just feeling thankful for being alive. But society doesn't trust this and tries to force it to become *amour proper*. Something more contrived, like a pride. Only problem is this quickly degrades into competition for recognition over others."

The mutual respect they have for each other is palpable. Jesse asks William what he's doing here. "What made you want to become an actor?"

"Well, I didn't want to be an actor. I told Paul I wasn't interested in being in his film unless it was revolutionary. Film as entertainment means little to me."

Jesse is taken aback. "But all film is entertainment!"

"Not for me," William replies. "If it's not communicating some truth, it's a waste of time." You can tell Jesse appreciates William's honesty but is puzzled with it. Later William says, "Jesse is so wide open. He's so young, but old at the same time. Almost like…crucified."

Meanwhile, Paul is looking into the camera. "Wow. I like that...you can go higher though."

"Boom up." Doug gets raised on his seat, still looking through the camera.

"More, if it goes more," Paul guides the grip raising the seat.

Doug laughs. "It has a long way left."

"Okay, that's high enough." The round mirror with the red and orange mirror tiles surrounding it, symbolic of Mars, frame Samantha's head like a halo.

"How are Paul's spirits? How is the shoot going?" It is Steve Sprung calling me to catch up on the proceedings.

"Paul is doing well, he's upbeat, you know him. We're a little behind schedule, it rained and we had to doctor the lighting which took longer than expected, but things are going okay overall. Paul said, 'If you set impossible deadlines, they somehow get met.'"

Steve chuckled. "Yeah, I know Paul. It was funny, because on the set of the movie *Clueless*, the production coordinator was a Penny Marshall type and when Paul walked in she shouted, 'Hey Steve, you're twin's *heah*!'" He assumed a thick New York accent. I laughed. "Then I forgot about that instance until I edited the film and realized how much we look alike. Then I ran into him at Trader Joe's one day and said, 'Say, were you an extra in *Clueless*?' Paul was kind of horrified that he was recognized for that and then I told him who I was and we became friends."

I told Steve that I and other people have been picking up his camera and shooting documentary footage. He was glad. Then I became aware of an exodus to the backyard. "Gotta go. We're changing location."

"Jesse, you're up," Paul flagged Jesse to follow him.

We all file outside in the back yard. Jesse is down the terraced hill for the scene when he crashes his car and runs past Gina and Jennifer, telling them that the cops are going to be

coming. A crowd stands on the ridge, including Mike and Laurie from next door. I explain the scene to them.

"Don't step in the puddle," Paul shouts down the hill. "It will be weird if there are footprints everywhere!"

Jesse nods. It is freezing. Jesse is in red North Face fleece, a rust colored t-shirt and jeans and dark sneakers. Apparently, Jesse arrived in expensive gray slacks and Martine made him change and wouldn't let him wash them in the house's laundry facilities. He takes off the fleece jacket to do the scene. It is supposed to be July, after all. They roll on one take.

"Okay, but don't look so perturbed...even though it is illogical..." Paul says.

"Okay," Jesse replies.

"Scene 19, Take 2!"

Jesse runs by, too unperturbed.

"Okay, take 3!"

"Excellent. Okay. Moving on."

"Check the gate!"

Two cases of water are being loaded into the house. Doug looks like he's dancing or maybe like a chicken scratching in the dirt to unearth some bugs. He is scuffing out marks on the rug where Gina is to stand. The scene is Gina gazing at the stars.

The lighting is difficult. I'm standing in. A large white screen is poised right by my face. Doug is squished against the wall.

"No, it's too bright."

"I can crate it."

"Take the crate away and put the gels on."

Thick, black electrical cords are constantly being moved, snaking around on the floor, alive. They call them *stingers*.

They dismiss me for a moment to work on the lighting, and Marina and I talk about growing up in small towns (she's from Springville, California and I'm from Syracuse, New York). We talk about the importance of becoming your own person before having kids or getting married. "You can't truly know others until you know yourself first." Her mom is an artist and can't work in her town because she doesn't have a community there. She can't stabilize herself in the right frame of mind. I told her that Paul and I had similar experiences in

Syracuse. You have to interact with other creative people to continue to grow as an artist and as a person. You have to be introduced to things you don't know, people who are on the fringes, or you can't learn and push your edges. That's what creativity is, after all, something new that is striking in comparison to what is already accepted. Samantha sends me down the hill to get a bill that she left in Paul's car, and I trot off.

William and I take a moment to go outside. We pass Michel, who was showing a bunch of photos on his digital camera to a small group. William said that Ailee was trying to offer us our own room. I said I thought she might be trying to move us out of it. Jeff comes out and asks us how we feel about the first week. I told him I didn't realize that there would be so much energy spent on neighbor relations.

Paul was saying that he wanted to re-shoot a couple of the rollerblading scenes, one with Gina walking and being circled by roller bladers and one with the last kid waving after they start skating away. Seth, on the floor using the printer, nodded. The close call with the neighborhood complaints about the roller bladers resurfaces in my head.

"Every movie has re-shoots," Paul said.

I'm sure that's true, but we have a lot of snapping wolves on our tails. Our tactic seems to be to converge, get our business done, and disappear before they can mobilize fully against us. William, Paul and I touch our jasper triangles together and collapse.

I blinked awake and stumbled to my feet, a dawning sense of something being different creeping upon me. The activity of the previous few days was absent. There was just a stationary mess now, cigarette butts in soda cans, clothes on the floor, equipment taking up most of the room originally meant for people. William had moved to the living room during the night because the space heater blasting made it too hot in the room and the air was so dry he had a parched throat. He didn't sleep well so we discussed other sleeping arrangements. William, me, Paul, Seth, Doug and Teo slept in the house last night.

Jeff ambles in with croissants and cinnamon twists from Diedrich Coffee for us all. I thought how considerate that was of him on top of the million other tasks he had. He looks more relaxed now that it is Saturday and it is a day off from filming. In the kitchen, Paul and Doug reminisce about *Freak*.

Paul turns to me, welcoming. "You know, I didn't realize how good I had it while making *Freak*. Doug told me that out of the seventy or more film sets he's been on, *Freak* was the best produced."

"Oh my God, really?"

"Yes. I had my own room and…where did you sleep, Doug?"

"I had my own apartment."

"That's right. Jimmy's dad owned that place."

"I've been on sets with much bigger budgets that have been much less organized. On one film they spent $50,000 on constructing building facades and when it came time for the shoot, the actors exited in the other direction. They said, 'Oh, it was a mistake and we'll correct it,' but it turned out that they had set up the whole thing on the wrong side and it was never in the film."

Paul and Doug begin gathering up their notes and Jeff joins them as they go off to scout the location for the fire hydrant scene, the one that originally was right near Selma's front lawn. I stay behind with William, who naps while I put in a load of laundry. I end up napping too.

Paul also runs errands, checking his e-mail at Diedrich Coffee, picking up trash bags and toilet paper. Everything seems to be moving along smoothly when, suddenly, without warning, I get a call from him asking me to take care of a rental van, and it's urgent.

"So Michel has to drive Jesse and there's no car rental places in L.A. tomorrow that have a van available because of the Oscars, and we are shooting the driving scenes so we need a minivan with dual sliding doors, a seat that folds into the floor and a back door that opens upward. Can you make some calls and see if you can find one? Try around the airport. Can you and William pick it up?"

All the crew are off on their own R&R. Our collective laundry (Paul's, William's and mine) is still in the machine. I rush around the house while making calls, afraid all the few remaining cars in the city are disappearing rapidly. It is hard to locate anything and we're down to trying the John Wayne Airport. I feel like I'm ordering deluxe hotel room accommodations at Woodstock. What are the chances of that?

I call a number of rental car places near John Wayne. I finally locate a minivan. It is chaotic and William and I don't know our way around the area. The urgency makes it all the more stressful. I talked to an agent and explained our situation. We're making a film and we

need exactly what we were looking for, and he said, “Really? I’m an actor! I’ll take care of you! So...what is your film about?”

My friend Bridget calls and William and I take turns filling her in on our adventures in the midst of all this. She can hear the tiredness in our voices. I explain that William and I were hoping to go for a short hike and then pick up the food for the next day. Supposedly it was our day off. I still had laundry to do for us, but ended up putting in an extra load of towels too, since people were just grabbing them out of the linen closet and not re-using them. In fact, they shouldn’t be using them at all as they belong to the owner of the house. Then there were several loads of dishes to be cleaned and hidden away. In doing so, I find the original sign saying, “Do Not Use” on the empty shelf. I knew all this would make our lives easier next week, but it felt above and beyond the call of duty. You start to understand how people in this industry become insensitive. It’s not that they’re inconsiderate as much as they are just trying to survive. I thought, well, at least I still have a couple hours for relaxing and sharing with William. Then my phone rings.

The rental car place has found a minivan with all the specifications, but it closes at 5 pm and we need to keep the van later than that for the shoot. Renting it for two days would be a lot more expensive, but Paul and Jeff had to go ahead because they didn’t have a choice.

At the kitchen table, wrapping up the details regarding the van, Paul mentioned that he was in the pilot of *House*, Bryan Singer’s new medical TV show; just a shot of him making an inquisitive expression.

“We were there writing the script for *Logan’s Run* with Bryan, and Ethan said, ‘Hey, can I play this part?’ and it was this small part of this depressed patient, and he had, like, six lines and Bryan said, ‘sure.’ Ethan’s not an actor at all. You know how many actors would die to have a line in a pilot episode, and it was like this casual, ‘Hey, I’d like to do this,’ and Bryan said yes, and somebody’s career is not going to happen because of it!”

Seth laughed loudly, shaking his head with amazement.

Paul and I piled into his car to go pick up the rental van, and Paul was playing Ween. The song *Stay Forever* came on, and I thought of William and psychically reached out to him, since *Stay Forever* is kind of our song. Paul was on the phone with Jeff talking about individuals from Emerge who want to invest in *Life on Mars* separately.

We entered the rental car place and an agent with the sniffles named Michelle helped us. The actor agent had gone home for the day. Paul examined a blue dyed marble apple on the desk as we waited for the paperwork to be processed. He saw a green glass globe with the continents frosted on and went and examined that too. "I like the blue apple better." I appreciated his gentle attraction to crystals in the midst of his hectic and demanding project.

We finalized the rental and Paul drove the van while I drove Paul's car listening to Ween's *Where'd the Cheese Go At?* It was only upon arriving back at the house that I was able to do the shopping for breakfast the next morning.

"Where are the plates?" William asked.

"I didn't get any. We don't really need them yet anyway." I was on such a tight budget that I had to go to the store every day and only get what we needed for the next morning. A bag of coffee was a huge chunk of the daily budget.

"What about the eggs?"

I slumped dejectedly in a gesture of having forgotten them as well. One of the grips had asked for a hot breakfast of eggs in addition to the general continental breakfast we had been having. He promised that he would cook them himself. I tried to discourage this initially. There really wasn't time or space or money for a custom ordered meal for thirty. It just didn't correlate with the busy scheme of things unless it was handled by an outside caterer. Especially seeing how the breakfast cleanup, so far, had fallen entirely to me.

Michael, the whole foods chef that catered some of the lunches, did only that portion of the cleanup to insure his utensils got back to his kitchen. He left the majority of the cleanup to his kitchen *boy*, William. And, in stark contrast to most of us, Michael was getting paid $300 a pop!

The new signs informing everyone that the owner's dishes and linens were not for common use were most often ignored. Considering that no one was supposed to be staying overnight in the house, according to lease rules, using a dish or two probably felt like a minor infraction. I didn't have time to complain, as three others had overheard the discussion about eggs for breakfast and were begging me to reconsider. I reluctantly agreed. Since I forgot the eggs, Paul said he would pick some up on his way back from dinner. To our surprise, the house cleared out and William and I stole an hour to take a bath together, figuring it was a safe assumption that nothing would come down on us while we were naked in a tub.

Afterwards I lounged in bed, since it was supposed to be a day off from production. I leisurely spent a whole half hour catching up on my notes. William came in with a child's playfulness in his voice and said, "Turn off the light."

"Why?" I said, indicating my journal. It was the first time all day that I had space to write.

"Turn off the light. Just for a minute."

I did, and William started twirling a flexible blue light stick in the air like an ecstatic eight year old with a special toy. Paul returned and saw us playing with it. We all took turns twirling it and waving it back and forth in each other's faces as fast as we could. Paul laughed with delight.

"When Doug and I were getting sushi, Doug went to the bathroom and I was sitting at the table alone and had this amazing moment of gratitude when this beautiful Japanese waitress came over and served me my food. I thought, 'Wow, here I am and this beautiful woman just gave me my meal and I am making my movie, it is really happening right now.' I closed my eyes and folded my hands in prayer and when I opened my eyes, Doug's soup was magically sliding across the table!"

William and I laugh delightedly. We are sleeping together on an air mattress in the big room with Doug in the bed tonight. It's cooler for William without having a space heater in his face. Doug likes a cool room and the windows cracked. But his bed is just two mattresses on the floor with a fake headboard precariously stuffed against the wall. Tomorrow they are shooting the scene where Gina sits on the bed staring at the stars. The original bed was too high to frame the shot right in relationship to the window. The solution was to dismantle the bed, put the mattresses on the floor, and angle the shot so you couldn't tell that the headboard was just a propped up piece of wood. To get the shot, illusions are a part of the game. I was beginning to take delight in this type of finagling; there is something satisfying about making something out of nothing, so to speak. I was beginning to realize that that was a big secret of what the movie industry was all about.

"Good night, my love," William says, taking my hand tenderly and kissing my pink tourmaline birthstone ring that he designed and had made for me.

"Good night," I answer, kissing a matching man's version with his birthstone, a garnet. We do this little ritual surprisingly often, almost nightly, a little honoring of each other and

appreciation of the level of passion and connection in our relationship. The pliable blue light stick glows around my wrist.

I awoke on an air mattress on the floor, William beside me, with a distinct chill in the air. I didn't sleep well in my cotton pajamas since I could not warm up all night.

With organized haste, we all troop down the street to Flying Cloud and Crystal Springs to shoot the fire hydrant scenes. In the first scene, Mark has crashed into a fire hydrant and water is spraying up all over. The girls run up to the scene and marvel at the stream of water.

A huge water truck with a fire hose is on site. The fire hydrant is a realistic looking prop. It is tipped over on its side with broken pieces of concrete scattered around it. The water truck was going to shoot water into the air from a hidden hose behind it to make it look like the fire hydrant was erupting. Paul snuck up behind me and playfully trumpeted, "Look at all this shit we got!"

The guy lending us the hot rod car that Mark (Jesse) was supposed to drive was late. Then he was really late, so we had to use Paul's red Honda Civic as Mark's car. I drove it into position on the sidewalk. Steve and Victor had arrived and Steve was shooting videos. I positioned myself down the street as a traffic controller.

"What's going on here?" an older woman walking a dog inquired.

"Oh, we're shooting a film."

"Oh, really? Well, isn't that something."

I explained the scene to her. As I was talking another man approached and I had to start explaining all over again. More residents passed by, and the reception ranged from mildly aloof to highly interested. The large hydraulic pump made a loud churning, vibrating noise when the water was on. A small crowd began to form, spellbound by the twenty foot high stream of water that flitted on and off to the commands "action" and "cut." Not a wicked witch in the bunch.

We were well into the shoot when the city truck came by. The guy who spotted it parked down the street immediately broadcast to Jeff. Suddenly we were all fugitives again. Jeff's voice came over the walkie-talkie with an urgent surreptitiousness.

"The water truck's down there talking with someone from the city so let's roll right now!"

"Okay, going again...going again right now!"

The officials were looking this way. We had a permit to shoot a movie, but the permit to spray water in the street was too damn expensive, even if the city had consented. Water was gushing in rivulets into the gutter, splashing high into the branches of large trees on the corner. Private property? Probably.

"Come on, Paul. Come on, come on..." I paced frantically back and forth chewing the inside of my cheek.

Our only chance was to outrun them again, escape while we could. We were almost done; we took two more takes, and beat a comically hasty retreat as the official was making his way up the street. Props were scooped up like mice in the clutches of birds of prey. The location emptied as people bailed like pot-smoking freaks during a drug bust. In the rearview mirror we saw the official surveying the drenched environs.

I went back to the house for a short break and then back out to shoot the racing scene. Up at the house, Jeff apparently rudely interrupted William while he was on a business call to his attorney in Mill Valley. After he had finished, Jeff was nowhere to be found. William was pissed. When Ailee came out telling him to get his butt in gear and clean up the trash in the side yard, he unloaded on her. "Let me make something perfectly clear, when I'm on a cell phone no one comes up and tells me to get my ass in gear. I will be treated with civility on this set. Is *that* clear?"

"Why are you telling me this?" Ailee argued.

"Because Jeff split too quickly for me to tell him."

Later Jeff asked me about it, saying William had gone ballistic on Ailee. I told him that there must have been a reason. William had been taking a lot of verbal abuse, and the more he tried to shrug it off, the more it seemed to escalate. It might be par for the course down here, but William goes out of his way to treat others with respect and expects it in return. I mention that William was invited to this set as an actor and an art consultant by Paul himself. Somehow, everyone's got this idea that he's a PA. Jeff sighed and shook his head as if it suddenly all became clear.

Down below, the camera is being carted around in the back of the rented Toyota Sienna half sticking out of the back hatch. One of the crew looked after Doug and said to me, "He's so condescending. I'm glad I'm not on grip or gaffer. I was called by Jeff for this project to be first AD and when I learned Doug was DP, I wanted to be in a position with a voice but definitely not

working under him." He said that he worked on a movie set once when Doug was working, and that the whole art department walked off.

I shook my head, politely listening, but didn't encourage the subject. I had no idea that communication on a movie set could go so haywire. The different departments didn't understand each other, and in some respects, weren't expected to. By not being properly introduced by Paul, William's role and duties stayed ambiguous. We should have known this earlier when Jeff asked, "What are you doing here? Your scenes aren't scheduled to be shot until part two." William confused matters more by saying he was there to help Paul in any way he could. In this business people just didn't say such things. To William the emphasis was on "to help Paul" but what was heard was "to help in anyway possible." So William became fair game. As a result, by the end of the first day, William was assigned the responsibility for checking in and out two dozen walkie-talkies and keeping their batteries charged everyday. He was also made personally responsible for assisting me in getting the continental breakfast together. Then trash collection was added. And finally he became the kitchen *boy* whenever the chef to billionaires appeared. Everyone was overworked, but somehow William was seen as an extra PA anyone could call upon, and during production, there is absolutely no time and space to sort such things out.

Beyond being an actor, Paul was largely under the impression that William was free to be his personal guru on all things alchemical and artistic. Since that didn't fit any named crew position, and the set was desperately short of PA's, William was tapped for fill-in. To them "…anyway possible…" sounded like an open invitation.

William and I weren't so naïve as to expect we would be spared busting our asses, but we saw our first responsibility was to Paul and replenishing his creative reservoirs. The tone of the rest of the crew was pure Hollywood, through and through. This wasn't a judgment. We realized that both approaches are essential, but the contrast between the two could not be bridged given the hectic pace of low-budget filmmaking. Something had to give, and it had to be us.

Finally, Paul talked to Jeff about William's role, "I want him to feel comfortable because I need him to come back and act. He's my friend. You need to prioritize his skills as they relate to the art department, not overload him with PA tasks. You wouldn't do that to Jesse, please don't to that to him."

The neighbors, Mike and Laurie, brought us brownies and received a standing ovation. They were a blessing, and we found them as delightful as they found us. They let us use their driveway for a lot of the scenes that required a shot outside a garage or in a driveway, such as the one where Gina drives up and passes the sparkler-wielding children. The Homeowner's Association are apparently letting Selma vent but not attaching too much weight to it because she complains about everything and they know it.

So, in the racing scene, this hip TV show host named Big C was racing Jesse in a black Camaro. Apparently, he actually does some car racing for a living. Paul pulled out little matchbox cars, as Doug suggested, and showed how he wanted the driving scene to go. *How clever*, I thought.

While this was happening, I took the opportunity to walk around and collect signed waiver forms from most of the cast and crew. Jeff asked me if I would gift him money in exchange for his signature if the book does well. Jeff is basically doing an ongoing executive's job for free, so I understood his request.

With the fire hydrant scenes we did our best to manage the traffic. It worked out because it was early morning in a residential cul-de-sac. Even then, we almost got caught. I didn't even fully understand what the consequences were, but from the reactions of others with more experience, I surmised they could be extensive.

Now, for the racing scenes, the situation was far worse. For starters, the shots required the use of longer stretches of road where sometimes two cars would be side by side with a conspicuous camera crew crammed into a van driving in front. Not something you could hide easily. We had to hold off traffic along a long stretch, communicating by walkie-talkie. I was surprised to realize that this was necessary. I did not know how to read the shot book well enough to have figured it out myself.

The scenes where we filmed the two cars speeding by from the sidewalk were easy. We just had to hold off the traffic for each take. But when Doug set the camera up in the middle of the adjacent residential street and crouched down to look through the eyepiece, our mouths dropped open in petrified disbelief. Now we had to stop the flow of traffic completely. From where Jeff and I stood just around the blind corner, there was very little room for the traffic to stop once they saw us. The camera crew's view of cars getting ready to turn right around the corner from the busy thoroughfare onto the residential street were blocked by bushes, so we had

to call out the coast was clear over the walkie-talkies. It was like one of the stunts that kids do where a skateboarder coming down a steep hill cannot stop at the intersection, so they have to depend on some guy at the bottom giving them an all's clear single. If a car suddenly came down the road the thing standing in the way of disaster was for the guy at the bottom to run into the street waving his hands frantically.

It also crossed my mind that if some disgruntled driver decided to call in a complaint via cell phone, the whole film could be in jeopardy. I tried to muster up all the pretty cheery innocence that I could. "Hi there! Sorry for the wait, but we're just shooting a scene from a film! It'll only be a couple minutes." I doubted that would do much good with the Southern California police.

This was a low shot of two cars whizzing by side by side, going in the same direction. It was crazy trying to shoot it without proper street closure. My job was to peek around the corner every ten seconds, and if a car was approaching to turn onto our street, I jumped out from behind the bushes and waved my arms like a crazed savage. It was the only way I could see the camera and stop traffic in time. In retrospect it was pure madness. At the time, the thought of getting killed didn't concern me because at least they would get the shot.

"Just hurry up and get the damn shot," Jeff said nervously under his breath.

Time crawled by one agonizing second after another. I was acutely aware that I was in danger and that that was not to be known by anybody beyond Jeff and me. Also, not all of the drivers were pleased at running into a movie set and being asked to wait. This was southern California so you could be sure that many knew in an instant exactly what we were doing. I was growled at a couple times, and gruffly asked if we had a permit! I would smile my prettiest smile and explain that I was just the traffic controller, but the head of the production department had accrued all the proper permits. Then, I would quickly add, "Oh, I think they're just wrapping up the shot!" all the while a running dialogue in my head was screaming, "Hurry up hurry up hurry up!"

I was markedly relieved, and Jeff nearly collapsed, when Paul gave his okay and Doug stood up and walked away from the camera. His assistants fell upon equipment like a pack of hyenas on a fallen gazelle. In short order, we all made a remarkably quick disappearing act, quite practiced by this time, before any of our unorthodox actions could catch up with us. We were all relieved that the next shots would be far away and on friendly territory.

The last shots of the night were in Pete and Robert's yard–the friends of Diane's whom I had met at her party before my parents left. Diane was there to watch the shoot, and Pete and Robert were all smiles and generous with offers of refreshments, which we graciously refused because there ended up being about thirty of us, something I'm sure they did not expect. Their yard had a nearly 360 degree view, which was perfect for the shots of Stefan and Gina gazing at Mars.

We mentioned to Diane that Mike and Laurie gave us brownies. Diane said that there was a Homeowner's Association meeting and that one person complained and that the group heard her out, but since she complains about everything they were not overly concerned. She didn't mention any names (she didn't have to), but she did mention legitimate concerns that with so many people walking on the roof that some tiles could be damaged. Paul offered to replace any broken ones.

Off in the corner, manning her sound cart, Amber was talking about doing peyote at Dead shows when she was thirteen years old and how that matured her. I was standing nearby, waiting for camera to be set up. Amber commented how Doug was very professional, but you could feel that the tension of the street shots had taken their toll on him. It had to come out some way and Doug vented by coming down on Seth and his crew for various reasons. Most just chalked it up to him having a "cranky day." Jeff says, "Sound blames the airplane, the DP blames production, while the AD blames the DP." I can just imagine the terror of hanging out in the streets all morning without a permit and concentrating on getting all the shots. If anything went wrong and we had to repeat the process, the chances of getting caught while redoing the shots was exponential. A lot of that fell on Doug's shoulders, so I guess he had ample reasons to be a bit "cranky."

It was a delight to see that Steve and Victor were on set. I could see Steve was busy doing video documenting and taking in the beautiful view of the valley below. Samantha and Trevor were lit up on the skyline by several floodlights. They glowed like they were standing on a surreal landscape. When Doug walked into this lighting with the hood of his black jacket pulled tight around his head he looked like an astronaut.

Diane has just asked for a copy of the full script. This is probably the third time. Paul is stalling her because the messy pool scenes haven't been shot yet. These scenes are filled with screaming swearing rants and the throwing of various tables and chairs into the pool, and he

can't take any chances that they will be thwarted if word gets back to the Homeowner's Association. Diane doesn't know this; she just thinks he's busy.

At one point, the camera has to be set up briefly in the middle of the road. We were out in the street again, this time in the dark, but diverting traffic was easier because there was so little of it. Under cover of darkness, to the few cars that were stopped we could have been a party spilling out onto the street. Compared to our street ordeal earlier, this was a cakewalk. Our biggest problem now was that the wear and tear of the day was catching up with us. It had been cold outside most of the day, and getting adequate food and drink was not easy as we were far from the house. To maintain our already dubious clandestine stance, setting up a Crafty table had been out of the question, so dehydration and low blood sugar was now a factor. Everybody was doing whatever they could to expedite the shoot so they could call it a day.

William told Doug about his first on-set tantrum with Ailee, and Doug said, "I've always been about keeping my cool but lately I've been throwing a little tantrum about once a day."

William gave a commiserating nod. "Hell, it was for good reasons, like people not being ready for the next shoot."

As these last shots for the night were in an isolated yard, people's nerves were lot more at ease. I learned that Wes, the AC, had moved to L.A. about four months ago and Kevin, the new boom op, arrived only last month and was already working. He graduated from college last May and wants to be a cinematographer. All the shots went well, except for one where there was a shadow on Samantha's face when Trevor hugged her after discussing Mars and Earth, only Doug's keen eye noticed it. As Samantha was so much shorter than Trevor, she had to stand on an apple box– a wooden crate used on movie sets to equalize dissimilar heights. As a result Doug had difficulty getting a good angle. We shot it again. When Paul called it a wrap for the day, we all breathed a collective sigh of relief. The last thing I remember is touching triangles with Paul and William before slumping into bed.

It was no time at all before the alarm went off at some ghastly hour in the morning, 5:30 am the clock says, as I got up to put on the coffee again. I'm starting to feel sick when I wake up, kind of poisoned. William doesn't sleep straight through the night and inadvertently wakes me up every time he moves our cheap air mattress. A misty cloud cover moved in last night and room became very cold. Having to sleep on an air mattress on the floor next to a sliding door

doesn't help. And there just aren't enough blankets available for everyone. *Why is it so cold in here?* The thermostat in the living room says 57 degrees. I, like everyone else, have been living on either Rock Star drinks, sugar snacks from the Crafty table or coffee. Nobody spends more than eight hours in bed, me especially, who has to get up an hour earlier to get breakfast ready. I've been getting by on six or seven hours in bed, but don't sleep soundly because of all the above mentioned conditions.

When the cast and crew arrive, I learn that Erik, the old boom operator, injured his ankle the day before the shoot began. No liabilities on the set, at least, that's one prayer answered. He's been walking on it since it happened. It was getting worse, and finally, production forced him to go to the hospital. He made a phone call and got picked up and taken away.

"I saw it and it was the worst thing I ever saw," Michel grimaced. "His ankle was swollen to twice its size and his foot was blue."

Amber needed a boom operator and Kevin had stepped in. He had never done it before but he is attentive, intelligent and open to learning and carefully following her instructions. That is how job networking often happens on sets.

William and I got talked into returning the rental car. William was not entirely comfortable driving in L.A. rush hour traffic and was not part of the transportation department. *And neither was I, for that matter. And why were we doing this? Because there was no transportation department, only Michel running around, two steps behind problems as he juggles transpo and catering.* I called the rental agency and their computers were not up yet. Ailee called back later and got totals and slipshod verbal directions. Neither William nor I knew our way around Laguna Niguel and nobody had a map.

I went with Jeff to the bank so he could get money to give us to pay for the car. Jeff turns to me suddenly and asks, "Do you have a signed contract for Bruce?"

"Yes," I reply, a little taken aback at the force of the question.

"Good," Jeff snapped, with finality not directed at me.

According to Jeff, Bruce has been late every day and holding up others at one of the houses while he drags himself through his morning routine. Jeff wants to fire him. Jeff doesn't take into account that transpo sometimes takes nearly two hours to locate a vehicle after the crew's twelve hour shift is officially over. So Bruce and others, actresses included, have waited hours to get driven back to their accommodations to eat and then to sleep. Once there was a

vehicle shortage for the next morning, so Bruce and a few others were rousted at 2 am, schlepped to the Laguna Niguel house in the middle of the night and deposited on the bare floor with only three hours to sleep before call time at 6 am. William heard Bruce complaining, but his concerns were not only for himself. Like him, there were other gaffers traipsing around assembling lighting equipment and stretching sail-sized gels all day. Having one of them fall off the roof would make a sprained ankle seem like a hangnail. *Hello? Earth to Jeff...* I'm sure Jeff, on many a day, would have loved three hours sleep himself, but it's not out of line that the grips need just a little more.

I was given $200 cash to pay for the car and driven back to the house. William and I embarked on our journey and ended up on a highway with expensive tolls that we were not given the money to pay for. Looking for a gas station, we found ourselves headed towards another tollbooth again and had to back up in the street to avoid it. At six dollars each way, I couldn't afford to pay again. For the past week I had been eating leftovers from the fridge rather than going out and spending six dollars for dinner with Paul and Doug. I had refused my fifty-dollar per diem so that Paul could have more money to make the film. Now that I was working for free I had to budget accordingly.

I drove the van and William drove Paul's car. It turns out we had a lot of trouble finding a gas station and if we didn't fill the gas tank on the rental before getting there, we would be charged double for the gas. Having to stop multiple times in parking lots to flag down pedestrians for help, William railed at the poor planning and the absence of a map. As a trained cartographer, putting him on unknown streets without a map was like locking a writer in a room with paper and no pen. Frustrating, stupid and totally unnecessary, to say the least.

We finally arrived at the car rental place, frazzled and knowing that we were taking way too long. We handed over the keys, and the clerk tried to charge us for a two-day rental, which was significantly more than the total that Ailee was given over the phone. I got Jeff on my cell phone and he had this long animated conversation with the manager of the rental agency. I was glad to have Jeff work that one out. They finally agreed on a figure, which was just slightly more than a one-day rental fee. I paid the manager and William and I got the hell out of there.

On the way back William insisted we stop for a chai and ice cream to reward ourselves for the whole frazzling episode. This was our first time alone since production started. It wasn't

much of a break, but it felt like a date. Grabbing our treats to go, we quickly made our way back to the house, me driving, as William retraced the map he had drawn in his head.

When we got back, it was time to break for lunch. There was some vague sense that something was awry, then I realized that there were only two pans of pasta on the table and nothing else. As this was still ominously dawning on me, Jeff rushed up to me saying, "Is there any vegetarian food in the house?" The urgency in his question stopped me in my tracks.

I hesitated a moment, replying, "Yeah, there is that tofu stuff still in the fridge. Why? Is this not vegetarian?"

"It's got chicken in it," Ailee chimed in without looking up from a pile of receipts she was checking.

I ask, "Is there not enough food to go 'round?" but already knew the answer. It's lunchtime and people were milling around, eating whatever they could.

"It's not as simple as that," Jeff frowns, choking back a roiling anger. "The guy is late. Michel's friend."

"Michael?"

"Yep."

"He was supposed to be here today?" My mouth drops open despite myself. I ran to the fridge to see how much tofu scramble was left, but discovered I couldn't check because there's lighting equipment in the way and it's a "hot set" (That's a set still in use and not to be disturbed in any way).

"It's a hot set and I can't get into the fridge," I report to Jeff.

"Sorry, Wes," Jeff says. Wes is a vegetarian. *What? Does that mean he doesn't eat?* I begin wishing that William and I had stopped for lunch. At this point, I half expect not to eat myself.

Jeff abruptly leaves with tight jaw and eyes wide and askance. By the look on his face you could tell he was enraged.

He reappears in less than a half hour, toting Subway subs for everyone. Few noticed he was still raving mad, as everyone was too busy devouring his gracious cornucopia.

It wasn't too long before a tall, thin man in his thirties appeared. His long, scraggly blond hair framed a set of glassy eyes. He looked like he hadn't shaved in days. He comes in through the back door with a large pan of lemon bars and what looks like cherry cobbler. Is this

the whole foods caterer? Our doubt was completely eradicated when he dazedly asks, "Do you know where I can find Michael?"

I look around. Wes, Joe, Ailee and Martine are also nearby. "No," Ailee said. "You need to speak with Michel or Jeff."

The man found Jeff, and Jeff promptly sent him away. "I wasn't rude, no need to kill the messenger, but when I tell the caterers to be here by noon, I mean noon sharp!" Jeff said, with authority. There were people in the room who watched with salivating mouths as the desserts were carried out the way they came in. One starving guy, his eyes never leaving the tray, says, "How much will you take for a few lemon bars?" The whole scene was surreal. Wes and Joe just laughed in disbelief.

"Next time get your Juicy Nectar here on time!" Mike jokes, completely flabbergasted.

William was pissed that we rushed back to the set thinking we would save money by having lunch here. He knew I had a quarter of a veggie sub to eat and leaves in a huff and drives downhill to the mall. He returns with a large peanut butter smoothie for us to share. We slip away to a deserted room and he shares his frustration with his role in the film and the skills he brings that are wasted because he's seen as an outsider. He feels that few understand the depth of the script and that what's being portrayed in the set design doesn't reflect the deeper meanings. Instead of a film about the alchemical transformation of consciousness, the set looks more like *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids!* He feels a sense of loss that he can't contribute these insights, and it saddens him that the film may be less as a result. As Paul's too busy accomplishing the impossible, all the days of their mutual brainstorming over the phone seem lost.

Pizza arrives. *Huh?*

I had eaten part of a veggie sub and shared a peanut butter smoothie, but still felt I didn't get enough to eat. Apparently other people felt the same way as the pizza started disappearing. Though I was happy to see the pizza, the haphazardness of the whole process was disturbing.

Mike Lynch launches in on a dialogue, mouth full of pizza, about the movie *Overnight*, in which an unknown filmmaker lands a big budget movie deal with Harvey Weinstein, then becomes so overly self-absorbed that Weinstein drops him. Paul jokes with Jesse about his humility, playing both voices, "So, you were nominated for an Independent Spirit Award, right?

"Yes.

"And you didn't win?

"Yes.

"And you scored a role in *The Hunting Party*?

"Yes.

"And you didn't get the lead so you murdered them.

"Yes..."

Paul was saying that he had cut scene 78 down to one shot from the original four. "We thought we needed all four and planned it before we had a dolly...now that we have one I cut three shots because we were behind."

Mike says it's hard for him to commit to jobs because he is doing his own projects, including having made a science fiction film about aliens. "It's always a juggle. I gotta make money." He picks up Steve's video camera and starts filming. I settled the receipts for my expenses so far with a little left over for food and other supplies.

"I thought breakfast was part of Crafty," Jeff said as I handed him the paperwork with the form Ailee gave me all filled out. I was perplexed. That would have been scary. Breakfast and snacks for twenty-five people on thirty-five bucks a day?

"No, that's not what you said earlier," Ailee clarified. "Maria and I asked you several times earlier in the week and you said we were supposed to set aside a little money for breakfast."

After everyone finished their patchwork lunch they wasted no time setting up to shoot scene 78. Doug squatted on top of the kitchen counter to survey the lighting and POV for the shot where Gina and Mark have a bonding moment at the kitchen table. Doug had just come in from scuffing around in the living room like a chicken to smooth out chair leg indentations in the rug.

Looking shell-shocked, Jeff announced, "This is the last ultra low budget film I will ever do. I love it, but it's gotta be the last one."

I chuckled, sympathizing with him. "I felt like it would be a disaster if we were charged for a two-day car rental instead of a one day."

I'm watching Wes doing magic in his little film tent again. He's constantly unloading the film from the oval container attached to the camera into round tins for developing. Each time he jots down film info for each tin in a blue logbook always by his side.

"That must be a stressful job," I think out loud. "If you mess up, the film is ruined and it's on your head."

"Nah, not really. You're nervous on your first few rolls, but you quickly get used to it," replies Wes with a casual air of mastery.

"You have to see Nicholas Roeg's *Castaway*. I think it's one of the great films of the late '80's. Also, *Hearts of Darkness.*" Paul appears and animatedly starts explaining *Castaway* to Wes and Joe. "You think it's about survival on this uninhabited island but it's really an allegory for the stages of marriage. It's metaphorical, all the problems and communications. They can't get over the border so they get married just for convenience. It's back to nature, beautiful cinematography. These guys know how to shoot, you feel like you're in the landscape..."

"Come on guys! We gotta move!" Paul bellows, clapping his hands for attention. We are behind several shots because of the rain and are juggling the remaining schedule to fit them in.

"Quiet on set, please!" Seth shouts, politely.

"Quiet on set!" Greg echoes, even louder.

"Roll sound..."

"Speed!"

"...camera..."

"Marker."

"Action!"

These commands issue from different parts of the house with the last one in Paul's voice as he looks into his monitor. As this scene is being shot, the art department is setting up for the next one. I heard comments that led me to believe that this was supposed to be happening all along. At first it was executed in a somewhat disorganized way, but now there's a military precision around it.

The scene unfolds with Gina stirring soup as Jennifer comes in. She floats across the floor as her hand strokes the wall as if testing its solidity. She's still heavily under the influence of the substance Gina has given her. Gina welcomes her with an all-knowing smile, expecting a glowing report of its effects. She's disappointed when Jennifer questions what has happened.

"How can you be sure that it's something good, not bad, that's using you?"

Gina says it's love and love can't be bad. This causes Jennifer to burst into tears just as Mark enters, puzzled. We are finishing up all of Jesse's scenes before he has to rush off to his other commitments. Bouncing around on a tight schedule is a familiar part of life for him.

Jesse started acting when he was fifteen. Back then he was this bright young man, offering girls Wet Naps as he nervously meets them with a humorous Woody Allen style. Later, he graduated to offering an Orange Julius instead. Sometimes he was critical of the girls he met, confronting them on their ideas and quizzing them to determine whether they just read it somewhere and were regurgitating it verbatim or exhibited some original thinking. Now in his twenties, he's living with his girlfriend Anna and has been fully initiated into the Game. Though he may appear quite cynical for his years, he has this commendable demand for honesty and realness in communication.

I watch through the monitor with Paul. He makes a series of thumbs up and so-so expressions to himself as the scene unfolds. "Cut!" he directs, and claps his hands together, seeming pleased. "Moving to scene 26!" announces Seth.

Paul took a moment to run to the bathroom between scenes. William happened to be in the other one, which shares a small courtyard. Paul was gone maybe a minute when William heard the call, "Paul, Paul, has anyone seen Paul?"

"I'll be right there!" Paul yells.

"I know the feeling," William says with feigned resignation, through the wall.

Paul laughs.

As I go outside in search of a splash of sun, I notice that the globe light on the post that was smashed by one of our trucks and then magically replaced is missing again. The art department went off to "borrow" another one for the upcoming outside shots.

I went back in and found a place by Wes' station as the next shot was being prepared. Wes was removing used film and storing it away.

"Here you are, doing your magic again," I grinned.

Wes smiled back.

"What's this thing called?"

"A magazine."

I raised my eyebrows. "Oh, really? I guess I can see that."

"I had a professor who compared film to war. He taught a whole class on it."

I pause. "I'm not sure I feel that."

"Me neither; but my professor equated the making of image on film with violence– saw it as a violent act."

"Hmm, well, there are similarities with film shooting out of a magazine as bullets shoot out of a gun. And working with a crew on set is similar to being in a platoon. And both have base camps and have to sleep anywhere they can. Everyone has a specific role and you all come together to help each other function as a unit, work twelve or fourteen hour days, but there's a difference of emotions at the end–war is destructive in nature and film is creative. Though both make you feel alive and snap you into the present moment."

Mike Lynch had come over with a video camera.

"Wow. I'm glad I caught that conversation. I heard it and wanted to participate but felt it was my role to capture it."

"That's interesting, as 'capture' is a word used in battle too."

Wes then describes to me that the halite crystals in blank film get transformed, as an alchemical process, when the film is shot. The color attaches to the halite crystals and in the bleaching process of developing, the crystals are washed away while the color remains. Alchemy. Knowing this helped make sense of why some equate the burning of an image on film with violence.

Wes takes a camera report sheet and attaches one to each canister. I stare off into space, vibrating with that profound fulfillment that happens when you have just learned something that changes the way you think about life. My academic studies have been deep enough to blur the line between creation and destruction.

Paul has told me that there is a little bit of me in Gina. In the film, Gina has a line, yelling at Ian, "Just answer me one thing. Am I saving them or destroying them?"

Ian pauses a beat, with furrowed brow, and answers with a question.

"Is there a difference?"

I sat down on the arm of the couch by Amber's sound station, still in a revelatory daze.

"I can hear the actresses' heartbeats," Amber whispered to me, "and there's nothing I can do about it. Silk and lace are the worst, and that's what Marina has on."

"Really?" I was astounded.

"Here." She suddenly took her headphones off and snapped them on my ears. "This is what I listen to all day."

I was immediately and eerily awash in a sea of sound, everything was clear *and* you could hear it all, several conversations at once, the buzz and hum of the entire immediate organism. My mouth hung open. Every step, deep breath, shuffle of equipment, you could hear it all.

"Wow," I managed, a look of astonished disbelief on my face and thanked her for sharing her world with me.

I felt like I had had one initiation after another when the meeting was called at the end of the day. Paul said that they had gotten a good deal on the purchase price of the raw film stock, not a great deal, but good enough. Originally I heard it was going to be donated through some inside connection, but that must have fallen through. He got the price down to where buying seven rolls of film got him three more for free. That seemed a bit roundabout and complicated to me, but, hey, that did work out to be some thirty percent off. I'm sure that wasn't easy to do.

Doug says that he might need a little more time for the garage shots than anticipated because it was supposed to rain between noon and 3pm tomorrow. There was also some discussion about the pool scenes; they would probably be shot Thursday at one of the pools in this complex, but we have a location B in case something goes awry, such as us getting escorted away by the police for the scene where Gina is swearing at the top of her lungs and throwing large pieces of furniture into the pool.

I had to make an impromptu night run to Subway for Doug because he did not like any of the choices available for dinner. I did my breakfast shopping at Albertson's, and came back in time to watch some of the dailies.

"Come here, Maria, you have to see this," Paul beckoned me over.

"I'll be right there. I'm helping William make the bed."

Every night, lately, we have had to, literally, hunt for our bed. It could be anywhere, in the living room, propped up against the wall, or totally deflated in a sad pile in a corner. If deflated, we then had to locate a pump. That, too, could be anywhere. Then after we pumped it up we had to arrange the bedding on it. Then start hunting for our few belongings so that we could change, brush our teeth and go to bed. There was no regard for our belongings. There was no time or extra personnel or space to have regard. I tried to keep track of Paul's, William's and

mine. As a Virgo rising, I am normally really good at keeping everything packed and neat, and finding little remote corners to hide things and claim as my own. None of us had much, just a small suitcase each, but there was no telling what was going to happen to them from one day to the next, or from one scene to the next, for that matter. This time I got lucky and found most of our stuff in the hall closet. Unfortunately, everything was piled up one on top of the other with their contents spilling out. This caused the sliding mirrored doors to jar off their tracks so I could hardly move them. I didn't care about our clothes, but worried about my computer and my expensive Marantz recorder. I finish making the bed so William could collapse and we could have a tiny, though transient, corner to huddle in for five or six hours.

I walk into the next room where the television is, and they roll the globe scene, and up on the screen it's me.

It was harder than ever to get up the next morning at 5 am. My whole body was chattering as I got out of bed. The thermostat said 55 degrees. I finally found out that the art department had been turning off the heat from the box out in the garage because it was making too much noise when shooting in the kitchen. They had forgotten to turn it back on, so adjusting the thermostat didn't have any effect. Finding this out didn't prevent them from doing it again. I started the coffee, after which William and I took a quick, hot shower, which revived me just enough. I ended up cooking the eggs. There were not enough for everyone. There weren't supposed to be, as this was just a special request by someone who promised to cook them and clean up the mess himself. But he was late, I kindly stepped in and when others smelled the aroma, they were miffed at a meager skillet full. That day it took me twice as long to clean up.

As soon as I was free I became a stand-in at the chemistry table. A light meter is a black, hand-held instrument with a white ball at the top that registers the light intensity. Tarina, the gaffer, was constantly waving one in my face. Tarina herself has never wavered. She's always there, aware of the situation and competent in her job. She was in the army, and the experience in discipline she got there silently shows in everything she does.

Paul tells William to start setting up his energy tools on the physics table. Though asked many times yesterday about the table, Teo has repeatedly told William they're still working on it and he'd be notified as soon as it was done. On the day of the shoot, William begged for access to his table. Teo smiled and said, "Don't worry, it's almost finished!"

"But Paul wants it assembled now so he will have time make adjustments," William informed Teo. "May I see it now? If need be, I'll finish it myself."

By now William suspected Teo was stalling, though he couldn't fully understand why. Teo asks Minty to show William his *special* table. "It's around back," Minty swoops low in feigned deference. We walked to the side of the house. "Voilá! Your special table, sir!"

It's tiny, made out of scrap wood and so rickety it wouldn't hold a flower vase. William is stunned. Doubly so, after seeing Teo smiling at him through the window as if this whole damn thing was nothing more than some fraternity prank. Minty covers his mouth pretending to hide his laughter and slinks away. Teo bursts out laughing. William shrugs it off and says, "Well, I guess they showed me!" but I could tell he was disturbed.

Trying to appear undaunted, William begins to strengthen the table as best he could. Once I'm free, I help by trying to find tools and the supplies he needs. He tells me he's thinking of leaving after he fulfills this obligation to Paul, as his role is only clear in Paul's mind and there's no way he wants any more of Teo's petty attempts to sabotage his participation. William has seen this type of crap before, he just didn't expect to find it here among people supposedly dedicated to making Paul's film a success.

As the weight of William's disappointment and the potential of not having the physics table ready for its shoot after lunch is sinking in, Mike and Laurie come out from their house across the lawn wanting to show me pictures of their recently deceased dog and instantly we must be all smiles. His name was Benito Juarez (Beni for short). They show us pictures of him and a spread from a calendar featuring a different dog each month. Beni was a cute little Irish Terrier with long hair. After they commemorated Beni's memory, they go back inside leaving me to sink back into worrying how William is doing with his setup.

Minty, from the art department, is standing out on the lawn and using a pump attached to a beaker with red liquid in it, which he is trying to get to foam. Foam starts spilling all over the place but won't spray up. The pump looks like what you would use to spread fertilizer or for pest control, a plastic blue tank with a metal wand coming out of it that has a nozzle at the end where you can direct the spray. Minty is swearing under his breath, and not so under his breath.

Paul is losing patience with the different groups all involved in their own commotion as he is trying to set up his next shot. Paul can be overtly authoritative when necessary. "Guys, we need to get moving! I mean now!"

All the crew in the immediate vicinity settles down at the order and he turns his attention back to the world around the camera. He moves the monitor over a little so I too can watch Gina trash a bunch of chemistry sets after removing the same chemical from each.

Michelle had had trouble finding the chemistry sets for Gina's lab in L.A. and had to order one, rush delivery, for $60. The art department was going to duplicate the box and fill it with similar items. It turned out that this would not be much cheaper than buying four more, but after coming to Laguna Niguel, Samantha found them at local craft store, for $30 apiece.

With what time is left, William neatly arranges his copper coils, amplifying cones and the TetraShield on the table he repaired. He now worries these expensive devices will be intentionally trashed by Teo and Co. as an extension of showing him who's boss. He's spent weeks and hundreds of dollars creating them, not as props, but to sell to his own clients. They're worth thousands of dollars. Paul assured him they would receive the utmost care, but under the circumstances, Paul has little control over that.

The energy amplifiers are cone-shaped. Most are about five inches high and made of polyester resin, with copper coils and crystals inside. At home he treats each one with respect. This is especially true of the TetraShield, which is striking and stands over three feet tall. Last year a client offered him over a thousand dollars for it. As he still felt there was more work to be done on it, he asked him to wait. It's really a work of art and to many, a tool worth having around for other esoteric reasons. That's why Paul asked to borrow them. And now their survival depends on a table hastily repaired by William as best he could. The cabinetmaker in him is ashamed of his work. His state of distress is still a source of amusement to Teo. William tries not to notice and lowers his head while using colored clay to create pedestals to hold up other crystals he brought down for the occasion.

Jesse arrives with yellow tote bag and laptop case for his scene questioning Gina in her lab.

Someone has pasted decals on the passenger van, and had added trailing flames on Paul's car to make it look more like a hot rod for the racing scenes. *We remain one step ahead of disaster*, as I notice Minty spraying red foam on the lawn and swearing within the line of sight of Selma's window. The image of Frodo running from the Nazgul on horseback and jumping on the Huckleberry Ferry just in time jolts into my mind's tired eye. People ask about traffic permits—we have none. It's called "guerrilla filmmaking" in the biz.

"How's life on Mars?" my Mom's cheerful voice rings out over my cell phone. I laugh. I tell her about the scenes with the fire hydrant and the racing and she asks about Jesse and about Paul.

"I bet there's always something to write about."

That's for sure.

The art department comes out to the driveway and swoops up the physics table William has assembled. He watches with abject resignation as his devices teeter back and forth as the table is rushed into position. The department heads had a meeting last night about needing to speed up the schedule, so things were a little more frantic, and, behind the scenes, a little more slipshod than usual. William showed Paul the tiny table he was initially given and Paul scowled and said that was totally unacceptable. Paul senses William blaming himself. He doesn't have time to ask for details, but he knows this isn't how William works. They work together tying to make the best of it.

Just then, Teo rushes up and asks Paul if he needs a larger table. "That would be nice," Paul concurs. Minty instantly produces one and begins locking the fold down legs in place. Then they both begin transferring the energy devices to the larger table. Teo turns to William and says, "Now that looks a lot better." They then busy themselves arranging dried herbs on another table and hanging bundles of dried black seaweed from the rafters. Paul asks that some of the orange, spiky petals and dried berry pellets be put into petri dishes. Loose crystals and copper wires are used for fill in. William stands to the side in utter amazement as to what has just transpired.

We break for lunch before shooting the scene and William recounts a story about how in Nepal they keep the spiritual impostors at bay. Anyone coming into the village saying he's a Sadhu is told to wait in a central square. As the men return from the fields they get him very stoned on hashish. Then the village elders assemble and watch him intensely for hours. If they think he doesn't have heart, he's sent away hungry. If they decide he's the real thing, a small banquet is rolled out in his honor.

When asked, he confides to Paul about not having enough time to set up properly and the resistance he has received from Teo. Whenever he raised his concerns to Teo, he was told on this set they're using a method called "back dressing" (a technique of putting as many props on

the set as possible and then removing those the director and DP decide don't work) and that's why they couldn't get his table ready any sooner. Paul listened carefully with pained amazement and shook his head. The whole purpose of bringing William down and requesting a loan of his unique energy tools was to rely on the combination to make the scene special. There shouldn't have been any sense of rivalry.

We were doing pretty well finding creative ways to get rid of our trash for free. Our first round of trash was clandestinely dumped on garbage day in neighbors' receptacles, the second was taken by the Chinese restaurant that catered our lunch a couple times, and the third was dumped in a dumpster somewhere in the area. I didn't know about this at the time and didn't want to know the details.

When filming resumed after lunch I popped my head into the actors' holding room, currently Jennifer's bedroom, where Jesse was studying and Martine was working on her computer.

"I haven't really had a real conversation with you. I like being on set and watching Paul's creative vision take form, but that makes it hard to get to know people."

"Come on in this room and you'll have more real conversation," Martine invited.

"I just was interested in what you're studying," I sit down next to Jesse, looking over at his book.

"Well, I'm taking a Greek philosophy class and a critical thinking class," Jesse said.

"Oh! Critical thinking. I wanted to teach that."

"Oh, really. Why?" Jesse gets really involved in listening to you when you talk. He begins asking sincere and pointed questions to understand you and what you're talking about with a demeanor that both draws you out and interrogates you at the same time. He'll fidget slightly and furrow his brows while he listens and takes in what you say, and often asks you to explain further, so he is not a passive listener. He is humble and says he doesn't trust his own opinions, he sees through Hollywood and says he gets depressed on movie sets, yet his intelligence always shows through in the things he says and the questions he asks.

"Because it teaches you to think on a meta-level, to question the values and judgments underlying any position, to not see things as black and white or take things at face value. You see beyond dichotomies such as liberal and conservative, for instance, and form your own new views compiled from both or beyond both, and if you do this you gain power, your mind can't be

controlled, the media can't blindly influence you. Jung calls this type of development the transcendent function, which is a crucial step in the individuation process."

Jesse had had similar conversations with William, and told William, "Paul thinks the world of you and you have lived up to everything he has said."

When Jesse asks William what he thinks about the dynamics of a film set, William replies, "Well, people here seem to think that if you give too much you get less. Or if you let others contribute, then they'll steal your credit. But in reality giving a bunch gets you bunch in return. People who think they know differently are the ones who get repeatedly screwed in trying to screw others first. I'm here for Maria, Paul and the film, probably in that order. I don't give a damn about a career in film. For me, this is a pure offering, but most here interpret that as some type of end game played to hide selfish intentions. It's kind of funny until you're on the receiving end of their defense against an attack that isn't there."

In Jesse's presence, you could feel William's joy in talking to someone real enough to understand. And the engagement in Jesse's demeanor indicated that Jesse felt the same way.

The juxtaposition of heartfelt human connection and furious activity jarred my psyche today. When I went food shopping with Ailee, she started asking me personal questions.

"How long have you and William been together?"

"We've been living together four and a half years but we've known each other about six. We met because we both wrote for the same magazine at one time and read each others' articles and started corresponding."

We went to Diedrich Coffee and arranged breakfast for tomorrow, pastries and coffee cakes, Ailee grabbing a whole bag of plastic ware from a Mexican takeout place on the way, then to Albertson's for supplies. We talked about Carl Jung and my dissertation and the counseling field and how I felt that the way it was designed to function didn't allow for the whole person to be treated. She told me that she was on Avacor at one point and that she normally loves laughter and that instead of laughing she would just say, "that's funny." She was then put on Ritalin because she couldn't focus on a task for any length of time. Though she could give her full attention to a task with action going on in the background, she could not focus in a silent room.

Back at the house, Samantha and William were bonding on the depths of emotion that's necessary to draw from each other while acting.

"I was listening to you in the hallway from the other room during the last scene and I was amazed at how much energy you were putting out and how it was coming from deep within your center, your hara."

"Oh, yes, I have to feel it down here to make it real." Samantha indicated her belly. "I'm not acting. I have to get into the space where it's real."

"I learned that from you the first day."

"If I have my energy flowing from higher up I can feel it, and it's not convincing. I can't just think about it, I have to get into the space where I feel it inside."

Amber spontaneously started telling me about her boyfriend, Hawk, who's a composer and writes Angelo Badalamenti type music and she said Paul may decide to use it for the end credits. She said that if Paul's interested there may be an option to pay a small fee for the music he wants from recording artists and then a percentage of the profits rather than thousands of dollars up front.

"Today is the day I'm happiest with so far," Paul bounds up to me, childlike and exuberant, "I have the light of Elendil!" He slides the self-renewing flashlight I gave him for Christmas halfway out of an inside pocket. "Shh! Don't tell anyone!"

I smile at his use of a line from the film.

"I got that from you guys," Paul says. It's originally from a dream that William had in which an old couple saw him and I looking at each other with love, recognized it, and with the vibrancy of Ruth Gordon in *Harold and Maude*, the woman turned to William and I conspiratorially and said, "Shh! Don't tell anyone."

"Now it's in the movie, Gina says that to her brother."

A large group went out for sushi tonight. I stayed in and cleaned up the kitchen, doing dishes that belong to the house that are continually being grabbed down from the cabinet despite the disposable ware provided for the crew's use. After that I had to haul out the trash.

Mike Lynch comes in, "Hey, guys, you're not going for sushi?"

"No, we're going to take a bath."

"You're chillin'" he answered, in a hip voice that could go along with a high five.

"Yeah, we're taking a fizz bath with the leftover bath salts from Gina's table."

"I have a good eye for resources," William added. Why let good stuff go to waste?

"Let's hope you don't end up like that plant," Mike laughs and moseys off.

Before the bath, Ailee and I make a run to Diedrich Coffee to pick up the leftover pastries for breakfast tomorrow. I saw the clerk's bracelet and said, "Can I see your bracelet closer?"

He showed it to me and I showed him my Venice beach bracelet, macrame with beads in it. They looked a lot alike.

"Wow, that's the first time anybody has compared bracelets with me." A little rapport for your free breakfast never hurt. We saved the film about $80 for two breakfasts, which is not totally insignificant given our financial predicament.

Before bed we touched triangles, but William can't find his. He's bummed. Thinks he left it *on* his luggage, wherever that got hauled off. Then William and I took our bath, a little quiet, private oasis, after which we located our bed, affixed the bedding, and fell down immediately unconscious.

In scene 36, Jennifer walks in on Gina in the garage and agrees to help Gina by ingesting substances.

"Is that a look?" Paul addresses Amber.

"Huh?"

"I thought that was a 'sound look.'" Paul thought for a moment that some trouble had arisen, some unwanted noise, in the sound recording.

I am standing behind a flag, a black felt rectangle on a metal frame in the garage. There are hoses and hose-like coils hanging from the ceiling, William's coils are arranged on the physics part of the L-shaped table arrangement. As the shots evolve, so does the complexity of her lab. Earlier, we all bustled around them twining fine copper wire and larger wires in arcs above everything. More herbs were added along with five hand-painted pictures of alchemical symbols done by William. Potion bottles were strewn around. Petri dishes were filled to overflowing with weird barks and a silver tray was stuffed with dried mushrooms. A tube light with a prominent glowing filament stood off to the side and flickered.

On the chemistry side, a double bulb with red liquid in it bubbles in a pan of hot water. The pump spray thing never made it as a boiling prop on set. The art department ended up installing another type of pump, which was operated by someone under the table while the scene was being shot. A black iridescent pyramid that William made sits atop alchemical books and one of his drawings. A clear red Mars-like globe, seen earlier in Gina's room, is lit.

To take this all in, a dolly track was set up at an angle to the garage door. When ready, Doug is slowly trundled along the track to view the pan. He makes a few final adjustments to camera and lighting and has some of the items on the table repositioned.

Amber is tucked into the corner with her sound cart. There are other people and equipment just out of the line of sight of the camera. The clutter is so dense it's almost comic. It's bizarre, but at the same time pristine; a stark contrast to the many people behind the camera breathing down each other's necks. It's so cramped, people assumed weird angles so as not to interfere with any of the equipment. I am one of those people. I just noticed that the Alchemy and Mysticism book that was lost earlier (or stolen) has been found (or returned).

The physics table is actually up on apple boxes but you can't tell. There's also a white bucket under the table you can't see. Amber is in black and white with a gray shirt falling over her shoulders Flashdance-style. Her black studded tank top and white, loose-knit scarf reflect her preference for stark contrast. She stands with the boom mike in hand popping bubble gum with her teeth as they prepare for the next scene. They are trying to set up a diffuser to soften the light above the chemistry table. Its opaque cellophane-looking gel sits in a metal frame. It's reminiscent of wax paper. Paul sits behind his monitor talking to Wes as these last minute preparations take place.

"Okay, guys. Rehearsal's up, everybody quiet, please."

"Rehearsing! Let's try this...and when I say action, Marina, you come in," Paul is in his familiar focused state, nothing existing for him except the immediate scene.

They begin executing the scene.

"Great, great, that was so great, everything I'm seeing was great, it was so genuine," Paul assures Marina. There are times when Marina needs a little extra reassurance, as good acting requires a vulnerable and open psychological state.

C-stands tower everywhere, some of the metal trunks have c-stand arms. The grips change so that you can have lighting anywhere and anyhow you need it.

"Freedom, big bear hug, big craziness, laughter. Okay, let's go," Paul creates the tone for the hug between Gina and Jennifer. The actresses become animated, almost dancing with the energy Paul has imparted.

"Action, Marina!" She enters.

"Oh my God! You don't even tell me you're back..."

"Cut!" The word punctuates the flow of life on the set and halts it.

The word "cut" does cause the world to stop as far as the camera and actors are concerned, but when you're on set, the word "cut" also causes an outbreak of thunderous activity. There's trouble with the camera, something on the lens. Hunter, the new AC, rushes to clean the gate. Amber is frantically trying to get the noise out of the boom mike. Teo and Minty are trying to get the boiling prop substituted. Paul is prepping Samantha. And the most momentous event–the Crystal City–is about to make its dramatic entrance. Here is where Gina's ability to transform minerals becomes apparent. This ability will be tested on plants and, finally, on humans, as she learns to raise the consciousness of each genre.

Big, thick electrical cords hang from the rafters, a white sturdy cylinder for a plug at the end of each one, three plugged into a small black box in the center. The new AC seems to carry out his prescribed role competently. There have been a few changes in the crew and there will probably be more. The new people seem to kind of just step in to the fray.

Paul stumbles over one of the light bases to get to the actresses. He instructs them and compliments them.

"All right, let's go."

"Sound."

"Speed."

"Sound speed, roll camera..." Seth guides.

"Marker." A clapboard is snapped in front of the lens.

"And ... action Marina!" Paul bellows with conviction. Moments roll by. "Cut!" Again, the cessation of time, all action immediately ceases. The actresses look over. "Louder, louder, and the line is 'well, that's the thing.'"

"Okay."

"You were good coming up there, the freedom of the laughter works," Paul intuits and gives soft feedback to counteract the abrupt break of the actresses' space.

"Okay."

"In twenty years no one will have this problem," Paul cryptically prophesies.

"Whaddaya mean?" Mike asks, befuddled.

"There won't be a problem with equipment that can't register laughter."

They run through another take.

"And cut! Great, we got it."

Paul consults Amber. There was a lawn mower registered but the take was deemed okay.

"Checking the gate!"

As the preparations and adjustments for the next scene take place, I go over to Amber, curious as to what seems to be malfunctioning. She'd rented a boom mike with a fuzzy gray windsock and it had way too much noise in it. The quality of sound just didn't live up to the price paid and she was going to demand her money back. She's not in a good mood at all. Without any coaxing, she spills the reasons why.

When Amber checked her voice mail messages last night, she found out her aunt had just died of liver failure due to alcoholism. When Teo checked his, he found out his roommate's mother was diagnosed with incurable cancer and had caught a flight back to Australia for an indefinite period of time, leaving Teo with all of the rent to pay. To change the depressing subject, Amber said how impressed she was with Kevin as a boom operator. Kevin says that the boom mike isn't that heavy but if you move your fingers even the slightest bit you can hear it over the sound equipment, so you have to stay absolutely still, which is hard to do for very long and requires strength.

"I'll say action, and give it a beat before you unravel it." Paul instructs Samantha to unwrap the large starter crystal for Crystal City. Ben stands by with clothespins on his shirt that are used to clip the diffusers on to the light doors. They have just poured beer in a beaker on a stand to be poured onto the crystal.

"That's beer?" I ask, a little incredulously, unreasonably expecting some more exotic alchemical liquid or something. Paul actually refused brightly colored liquids, feeling that they look too artificial and unbelievable as real chemicals. And he's right.

Candles surround Samantha, some tall ones and some inserted into bronze candleholders with cutout stars that I remember seeing in Paul's apartment. They glow in the dark. Paul has ducked into the kitchen and is choosing a pan out of the cupboard to hold the starter crystal, which I provided from my own crystal collection. The teflon will scratch, so he chooses a clear pie pan.

The Crystal City is constructed from Plexiglas rods with filed edges approximating the real crystal shapes in the pan. They're all different sizes. This was the option that cost the least

money and required the most work, but with the lighting and camera angle, they look surprisingly realistic.

"Team B for rehearsal," Michel comes in and ushers me to Doug.

Setting up for the shot of Gina unwrapping the crystal is a big project. Doug pulls out a white Japanese lantern to provide the kind of diffuse lighting he is looking for.

"The silver is shinier that the crystal. Can we put that blue down?"

He takes the crystal wrapping from me, which is blue velvet, and arranges it on the silver spray-painted table. Tape measures flash in fleeting bridges from my face to the camera, from my hands to the camera. The candles are arranged and rearranged; large strips of blue velvet are laid down with ripples in it to give the camera some texture to capture. The problem of the shiny silver table is solved. Finally, the blue velvet that is supposed to be used as the crystal wrapping is replaced by a red cloth with gold sparkles. Paul approves the final result.

"Cut," Paul steps in after the first take. "I just want it to come out, to emerge, not have it pulled out of a wrapped circle."

Samantha adjusts the way the crystal is wrapped. The certainty of detail that Paul envisions helps the actors a lot, it gives them confidence and direction. Paul has the whole movie pictured in his head, and this minimizes confusion for everyone. When the picture in Paul's head won't work practically, Doug and Paul come up with a viable alternative.

The beer has become amber colored with dye and has been heated and is poured over the crystal, wisps of visible steam rising from it. I am sensitive to crystals and felt that it was manhandled a little roughly, knocked around and then sloshed with hot liquid. Michelle brings the food coloring dyes out in little spiky bottles. All told, it took maybe forty minutes to light the shot and arrange the props.

"Okay, we got about four minutes," Doug prods everyone to speed it up a little.

"Okay, let's go!" Paul settles down in front of his monitor.

The crystal is miraculously dried, re-wrapped, and the liquid replaced. There is one more lighting test that Doug needs because Samantha is blond and my hair is brown, so there might need to be a slight adjustment.

After the next take, we break for lunch. It is Ben's 22nd birthday and we had a surprise cake. It must be an interesting experience to have your birthday on a movie set. I don't think anyone took any video footage of Ben blowing out the candles; an opportunity missed. I just

realized that we were out of water again and then Michel walked in like some kind of superhero with ten six packs for ten dollars.

I looked down at the street below where the rollerblading scene was shot. Wide-eyed, I said, "Look at that." A broken light post was propped up with wood boards nailed to it and it had a couple orange cones around it.

Jeff heard me and said, "Guess who did that," and pointed to himself, nodding guiltily with pursed lips.

Amber's coming down with a bug due to emotional exhaustion. And perhaps from too much partying after hours--some of the crew have taken to drinking and smoking pot in the garage. I gave her some Ilex, a Chinese holly extract that miraculously nips colds in the bud if you take it at the first sign of scratchy throat. Her soundboard cost $4000 and she rents the battery. Her boyfriend, Hawk, is having laser surgery for a stigmatism on Friday. He'll go in and have the surgery and then has to wear something at night and not rub his eyes for a year but will be able to see right away. Amazing. Amber says that she usually hides in a corner on sets but that this is a cool crew and she hangs out with everyone. She used to do camera work, which she was a lot less passionate about, but when she discovered sound she immediately became a total geek. She got paid more in camera and she was more in the limelight, but going to work was a chore. Now she enjoys what she does and feels she's found her niche.

Michel was walking around, snapping pictures on his cell phone. The thing about being on a film set is that you, yourself, can be on film at any given time. People are encouraged to take photos and video footage for publicity use later on, and for the documentary of the making of the film that is being edited together by Stas.

The next shot was of Samantha walking down the street. Paul talked her through it. He also took the time to talk to both Samantha and Marina separately about crystals. Marina is attracted to amethyst, a spiritual stone.

"I heard that it is bad luck for other people to touch your crystals," said Marina.

"I don't necessarily feel that," I said. "It depends on the person. I ask some of my friends to touch my crystals on purpose, to hold them so I can connect to their energy through them."

Samantha said, “Thank you so much for letting me wear your necklaces. I love them.” I provided three necklaces as props.

“Of course, you’re welcome. I wanted them to be in the film. Paul asked me if I had any jewelry that didn’t look store-bought.”

In the meantime, Paul opens a book of Rumi poems translated by Andrew Harvey and begins reciting, “The tender words we said to one another, are stored in the secret heart of heaven. One day, like rain, they will fall and spread, and our mystery will grow green over the world.”

Samantha is to read this poem in the next scene.

“This is so outrageous. It’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever read, not only will it grow but it will spread, and it all started out from tender words, that’s what we are, tender words ...” Paul’s sky blue eyes are full of love, slightly teary with inspiration which make them an even more beautiful blue. Samantha said Paul and I look even more alike in the reflection of the mirror. I tell her that I feel like we overlap into one person about 80 percent. She said it’s even in our mannerisms, our vocabulary and our energy, not just our looks. Ailee said that Paul and I have such beautiful blue eyes and she always wanted blue eyes. She said everything on her is brown, “Poop, poop and poop,” the little kid in her appears as she points to her hair, her eyebrows and her brown eyes. I think she has exceptionally pretty hair, strikingly thick and wavy like a lion’s mane–and long when she finally lets it out of her pony tail. I said that if you think about it, blue is kind of a weird color to have on your body. Samantha said that Paul and I look like those twins that are mirror images of one another.

Paul and I move to the kitchen with Samantha. Paul recalled, “I didn’t know what I was really writing even as I was writing the script, it just came pouring out of me, but if I hadn’t read all those books of poetry and alchemy and consciousness studies, I’m sure it wouldn’t have come out that way.”

I said, “I remember when I first read it I was amazed at all the symbolism that you used that you didn’t even consciously realize. You wrote it in two weeks.”

He said, “Yeah, you might think that you sit down and ‘now the work begins,’ but it just came out.”

Samantha said, “But that’s how the creative process is anyway.”

I grinned. “The mystery grows green over the world, but not necessarily *this* world ...”

Meanwhile the grips and art department are still setting up for the next scene, which is the fully-grown Crystal City. Ben has gotten promoted to Bruce's position, which is paid ($100 per day). Bruce is gone, I think he got another, better paying job, and left early. Kevin got promoted to boom mike operator, which is also paid. New people have come on. It's amazing the amount of changing around that happens here, there are a lot of people, especially in the lower positions, working only part of the shoot, usually because they get a paid position somewhere else and leave. There's always somebody eager to replace them, it seems.

The table featuring the crystal is now lit from below through holes that were drilled in the table to give more light to the crystal, and later, to Crystal City. Paul coached Samantha thoroughly on the Rumi poem so she would be in the mood.

Anna Lisa, the girlfriend of Paul's who stayed over one night, is visiting the set. I went back to the garage and ran into her. She's feeling better than when we met a year ago. She's still on a diet of about fifteen foods due to long-term physical problems. Then she became allergic to cats after her beloved cat died in October and before she got another in January. She did a homeopathic remedy for six weeks and her allergy was cured. She's thinking of moving to Portland, Oregon, where William and I live, and is shocked at how much cheaper the rents are than in Los Angeles. I heartily agree. William told her that some allergies can be cured by simply moving from the city to the country. Just removing yourself from environmental pollutants will do wonders. I showed her around the set and brought her to Paul. Paul was saying that we were getting used amphibian suits from a Dairy Queen commercial that we can modify and add digital effects afterward to create an alien landscape and we'll be set for the alien scenes.

Amber says that this movie has less sound than any other film she has ever done.

"I'm so bored. There's so much that's MOS." (This abbreviation denotes scenes shot without sound. It originated as a hybrid phrase used by German cinematographers: *"**M**it **O**ut **S**ound."*)

I know Paul feels that films which emphasize filmmaking as art rather than the usual commercial aspects are usually better if they're not over-scored and that the pace should be slower rather than rely on slick action and special effects for impact. The impact should be in the story and in the level of thought that that story provokes.

Paul and I make faces to each other across the set every time we catch each other's eye. Crystal City has now grown to cover the whole table. The lighting from underneath gives it an animated effect. Mike, the scripty, was conked out on the couch today. He's now taking still photos of the set. The two bedrooms are partially back to normal; the original furniture is mostly back in its place, by some bona fide miracle, otherwise known as the art department.

Filming Gina drinking her potion by the Crystal City goes overtime due to the lengthy set up, so we have pizza ordered and delivered. By law, crew cannot work more than six hours without being fed, and we had just reached the twelve-hour mark; six hours since lunch. We usually wrap right before dinner and people are left to fend for themselves, but today we have a dinner break and then go back to work.

Greg comes in with some mixed juice he is absurdly proud of.

"Look! It's Juicy Nectar!"

Chris examines his glass with a deadpan look.

"Nectar is dense. Your juice is just processed bullshit."

Greg slinks dejectedly away with his glass.

They move the curly hose on the ceiling, change the frame on the camera, and close holes in the crystal table where too much light is coming through. It's now 8:30 pm. Crew call was 6 am. William and I went to bed at 11:10 pm after having to find, inflate and make our bed.

This morning, I ran up to Steve Sprung and gave him a big hug the moment I saw him. He's here filming footage for the documentary today. We have set up for the shot outside the pool where Gina and Jennifer are about to break into the gate with a credit card. The shot is modeled on a photo in the Sally Mann *Immediate Family* book of three of her kids with arms crossed, looking defiantly at the camera.

"Let's see some attitude, guys," Doug said as he held the card with rectangles of graded shades of grey on it in front of the camera. We did the pose, Paul and I. "That was wonderful," Doug grinned.

I said, "The Great Eye has arrived."

Paul jumped on the reference immediately with gusto.

"Let's think about this for a moment, Doug is the eye of the film, Amber is the ears, Steve is the ... heartbeat, I am the soul, and ...what are you, Maria?"

I raised my eyebrows mischievously. "I'm Samwise. I'm totally Samwise."

"You're the stomach. The stomach is very important."

Setting up the food this morning was a big scramble because it had to be carried down to the pool area. The pool is heated and located in the Laguna Niguel complex near our house. It's a sort of pointed kidney shape with a clubhouse right next to it. The clubhouse has a nice kitchen off to the side of a big open area with pastel blue chairs and a piano. There's a big fireplace in the middle, which is open at each end, front and back. I don't think the local residents use the facilities much when the weather's this cold. I sure wished it were on today! I looked around for some matches but could not find any.

Everyone is exhausted and grumpy. Jeff walked by and thanked me for setting up the Crafty table and completely ignored William, who helped me pack everything down the hill. William is disgusted by such pettiness on the set. He removed the two rings I gave him and tucked them in his little black bag because he didn't want them to collect the energy of all the small-mindedness and jealousy that's flying around and adding such stress between him and I. It made me sad, but we later talked and he explained it's the only way for him to protect the sacredness of our relationship amidst a situation that equates closeness with weakness.

Michel is frazzled on his cell phone, "You've gotta be kidding me, that's a bunch of frickin' bullshit, you gotta be kidding me. We just doubled the amount of money..." Apparently, he's making a film that, for some reason, is now going to cost twice as much. He paces around, swearing and making everyone around him uncomfortable.

Amber drank half a bottle of Jaegermeister last night. She's hung over, disgruntled and preoccupied with her own problems.

Paul ran in and handed me some sunscreen. He's oblivious to a lot of the dramas going on, and he should be. That means that production is doing its job. It's getting near the end of the shoot and people are frazzled, having overextended themselves in their jobs due to the low budget which allows for no luxuries and only select necessities.

The jacuzzi is not heated. Palm trees, short stubby ones with big fern-like leaves enclose the pool area. The place is too manicured, it has a sterile feel despite its luxuriousness, but I would gratefully go in the hot tub if it were on. The temperature outside is in the fifties and we have to make it look like summertime. I have five layers of clothes on and I still can't warm up.

Buck Reynolds is on the set today. He's an actor friend of Paul's whose mother is a friend of Andrew Harvey's. After making sure the food is all set, I greet Buck, who's talking to Paul and Steve. Mike listens off to the side.

"Maria, do you remember Buck?" Paul cordially opens the introduction.

"Yes, I do, how are you?"

Paul is talking about a cousin or some relative of Steve's who tried to make him like the movie *Basic Instinct.*

"My favorite movies are *Apocalypse Now, Walkabout*..." Paul was reiterating the conversation for his audience, narrating both sides.

"And you like *Basic Instinct*, right?"

"Well, actually, I didn't like it at all..."

He kept trying to convince Paul that he did like it, not by giving an argument, but by *telling* him that he did as if it were a fact. This relative also wrote a horribly cheesy song, which he performed for his acting class, that went, "I wanna meet you on the dance floor, baby, 'cause that's the only way I'll make you mine, make you mine." It was so cheesy it was embarrassing.

Buck's mom, Dana Reynolds, is a Catholic priest, the first ordained woman; of course the Pope doesn't approve. She's starting her own church.

"Good for her, she's forging territory in the Catholic tradition. That's hard to do."

People manage to get it together, to light the shot as if it were a sunny day in July. Marina has to dive into the pool in a bikini.

"You're gonna talk me through it, right?"

She is in a black bikini with white trim and it is maybe sixty degrees out now. Up until the last minute, we were not even sure the pool was going to be heated. It seems like we always get just enough to pull it off, just enough. Marina is constantly being covered and uncovered with blankets during rehearsal. Paul talks her through, "Now, we're only going to do this once."

She dips her toe in the water and dives in. "It's actually warmer in here than it is outside!" She is a little breathless.

Marina climbs out and Ailee and I immediately wrap her up in towels and a sleeping bag. Paul attends to her by the now lit fireplace. Thankfully, somebody figured out how to light it. Marina is now called out to set up the next shot, which shows Samantha tossing towels and chairs into the pool. Markers, in the form of colored tape, are put down by the actors' feet as

they stand where they are to land. I act as the stand-in. When Samantha comes out, Paul coaches her on how to bend down and look at the water. It takes several minutes to set up the shot. Marina is still in the pool all this time. I'm totally exhausted because even wearing five layers of clothing, my teeth keep chattering. I feel for Marina, wondering what's taking so long.

The camera was on the ground for the diving shot and now it's on a dolly cart. During the diving shot the boom mike was high above, maybe twenty feet in the air. The takes keep getting postponed by Amber calling out, "Hold, I've got another airplane." At first you hear nothing, but then, if you listen very carefully, you hear it. By that time, in Amber's earphones, it probably sounds like a deafening roar.

Now there are two lighting squares; the one I can see is marked "4x4 silver bounce." The other looks similar with a blue cellophane square over it.

Samantha goes through the motions of following Jennifer's actions with her eyes. Between takes, Marina huddles on the floor all wrapped up in her pale blue robe. Doug scurries about with various lenses hanging from his neck. From time to time, he whips out a light meter from one of the many pockets in his vest. There are so many details to attend to in laying out each shot.

The caterer, Michael, Mr. Juicy Nectar himself, has arrived. *What?* I thought he had been fired.

"And ... action!"

4x4 reflector boards surround Samantha. She's supposed to be looking at the water, but the boards are the larger part of her line of vision. The camera is on a sand bag on the ground.

"Well ... yeah, we're moving to 43 right now."

Everything gets moved.

"Check the gate."

"Gate's clean! Guys, we're movin' on." Seth sips a Diet Coke and walks away.

Wes comes over with another magazine of film. He pulls out some film on the bottom to form little loop, then he hands it to Hunter who loads it into the camera. Everything is done with coordinated movements.

Kevin comes over to Wes and I.

"I just wrote down what you did," I informed Wes. "You pulled that little loop out of the magazine. I've never seen you do that before."

"Yeah, it helps to load the film."

"So is it just coiled in there?"

"Yeah, the Panaflex 16 has 400 foot magazines."

"The cook is here making teriyaki chicken," Kevin says hungrily.

"Yeah."

"And Juicy Nectar."

"You know, we should tell Amber to record some of the things he says," Kevin lights up with a burst of inspiration.

"That's brilliant," Wes beams. "C'mon, let's go tell her."

I walk over to the hot tub with expectation. It's still freezing cold.

Paul has just joined me and stares down at the cold, still water. "The wrap party's going to be in the other heated hot tub."

There is a moment of silence.

"We're staring into the secrets that water holds, just like Gina."

"Yeeees," Paul says, with a revelatory quality in his voice. "You'd think that with no money you would do a film with heavy dialogue, not much visual, in one room. This is the opposite; little dialogue, heavily visually interesting."

We break for lunch and Paul and I walk over to the table.

"We're getting good footage considering the budget we have. Considering we don't have beds to sleep in at night..." Paul gives a weak, apologetic laugh.

Michael looks over at us as he's laying down the spread. "Are you twins?"

Chapter 7

It's a Wrap

"Guess how long the script was for *Eraserhead*," Paul grinned challengingly.

"Hmmm ... I don't know. Fifty pages?"

"Wrooooong!" Paul drawls theatrically, mimicking Dennis Hopper in *Apocalypse Now*. "It was twenty-seven pages."

"Really? Wow. I guess I can see that."

"And guess how long the script for *Fitzcarraldo* was."

"I don't know. Two hundred pages."

"Wrooooong! Ha ha!" Paul gloated playfully. "Three!"

"It was not!" I said in disbelief.

"Yes, it was," Wes chimed in, with the tone of someone supporting something official. "And it took Herzog three years to make *Fitzcarraldo*."

"I knew that. Everything went wrong. I think someone got killed on set when the boat slipped back on its runners as they were hauling it up the hill. Ugh, imagine that happening!"

"Yes, and Herzog pulled a gun on Kinski when he threatened to leave. He said, 'If you walk off my set, I'll kill you. I'll shoot you five times with my six-shooter and save the last one for myself.' Can you imagine making a movie like that?"

We all took a moment of awed silence, as if paying ritual tribute to a guru, which we were.

Off to our right, the unheated hot tub began steaming. The art department was using a fog machine to simulate steam coming off the hot tub because the neighborhood management was too stingy to heat it along with the pool. The steam looked surprisingly real.

Marina was back from doing water shots again and now had a white towel over her hair and was wrapped in a white blanket. She looks like a guru herself. Up at the house William was wading through a really disgusting mire of dripping tins and decayed soupy vegetables. When we return, the kitchen looks almost normal due to his efforts. William said he threw out guacamole that had turned pure black as well as other things that were completely unidentified.

The next scene was being staged at the pool. During rehearsal, Samantha throws a small, white table with a grated metal top into the pool. Paul is very meticulous about staging this shot, positioning the actresses very carefully and explaining to them what to do. He's showing Marina how to grab Samantha and drag her away after she trashes the pool.

Ben is pushing Tarina back and forth along the inside curve of the kidney-shaped pool on the camera cart to determine how the arc of the shot will be. Doug does arm- swinging exercises waiting for the monitor to be moved. Paul lifts sand bags like barbells in bicep curls. Rolled up pink and blue towels await their soggy fate quietly on the white tables and deck chairs. Doug is now lifting sand bags for weights, and Paul does a bunch of push ups as Steve films it and feigns diving into the pool. Now he's lifting the sand bag the way Doug did. I haven't done any of the martial art stances I thought I could do on set. I have to sleep more than four hours to be motivated to do that. Paul told me that Werner Herzog said that to be a good filmmaker you have to be an athlete. Well, Herzog definitely was, or else he would've been killed making movies such as *Fata Morgana*. And the crazy genius, Klaus Kinski, must have kept him on his toes to be ever ready to violently confront his *Best Fiend,* as Herzog affectionately called him.

"Go ahead, when she says, 'you shit,' and throws the towel ... that's right, then the table, then that one ... very good, the other one is already in ... then that chair, then finally the plant. Then you're pulled away and there's something funny about it. Very good!"

Michelle re-rolls the towels, these two white, for the next round.

Paul looks over my shoulder as I write. "Hey, it looks better in print. It sounds like I said something really instructive." I know what he means. He goes off to set up the next rehearsal.

"Okay, we're going to do a rehearsal with the stand-in white towels," Paul announces as Marina enters the pool again.

"Rehearsal's up!" Seth spreads the word.

"Quiet on set!" yells Greg.

"And ... action!"

They go through the scene. Marina fetches out the two towels afterward. Paul wrings them out and drops them. Ailee takes them away in a plastic bag. They are rehearsing again. It's a complicated sequence and takes some time. The twenty foot high titanium boom mike hovers above. Looking at the towels, I find it amazing that all the necessary props just always seem to be automatically there when they are needed. This is no small task.

They rehearse yet again. Marina retrieves the two white towels from the water. "I feel like a dolphin," she comments as she's bringing them out.

Paul coaches her, "I can't talk you through it during the take, but you seem to have it down pretty good."

Mike Lynch is prone on his stomach with a sixteen-inch long lens on his camera taking a picture of Marina. Doug is now doing jumping jacks– Jumpin' Jack Flash.

"Ready to let it all loose? Whooooooo!" Paul cheers, pumping the actresses up for the scene.

Everybody assumes their proper position. "Action ... cut!"

"Going again right away."

"Sound…speed! And camera ... marker ... and action!"

Gina goes wild, throwing towels, chairs and plants. Jennifer is amused at first, then annoyed at Gina causing such a ruckus.

"Cut!"

Everyone claps. Jeff and Seth mop up the extra water and Ailee begins drying the damp spots with a blow dryer.

"Forget about the blow dryer," Paul instructs.

"What?"

"We're going to take it like this."

"Please get that water bottle out of the shot over here." Doug peers around the camera with thin tolerance.

Marina is still in the water. The sun goes behind the clouds. The clouds are amazing. They are the texture of botryoidal malachite, little fluffy bulges in the sky. White puffs flow by way below them, one after the other. Others are commenting on the clouds, even in the hubbub.

The only problem is, the clouds are ruining the shot. The scene calls for a sunny day in July.

Samantha throws the fake plant in and splashes Doug and the camera, making an "oops" face. Everyone laughs.

"Okay, picture's up!"

"Quiet on set!"

I see Paul rubbing his hands together. I get up and bring him his ski jacket, which he puts on.

They roll again and wreak havoc. Paul says, "I'm pleased. It was a great take."

Samantha, back in powder blue robe, grinning wide, says, "I love that."

"I know," I answer conspiratorially. "I've always wanted to throw a bunch of shit in the pool."

"Who doesn't?" Paul adds, matter-of-factly.

Marina is still in the water. Others are standing around in winter coats. I ask Marina if she wants a cup of coffee and she gratefully accepts. I hand it to her in the pool.

"Amber, do you have some music?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Can we hear some?"

"Yeah," she smiles.

"Okay, guys, here we go!" The command terminates every conversation going on.

"Roll sound ... sound speed ... camera ... marker..."

"Action."

The whole mayhem repeats. Paul stood there a moment, a little incredulous; hands clasped in front of his face as if saying 'look what I'm making them do.'

"Before we did the scene, I thought that I should be yelling at her. Now that the stuff is almost hitting me, I have a different reaction," Marina says to Paul in reference to having towels and furniture thrown at her in the pool.

I run over and mop up the water on the concrete with a towel. Michelle sets up more dry towels. Marina floats up, draining her coffee and I run up to her and take the cup. "Thank you so much. That felt really good."

"Thirty seconds ... " They're getting ready for another take as a plane speeds by overhead. They hold off until it is gone.

"Cut! Excellent."

"That's going to look very awesome."

I give Marina a towel, poor thing, and run and get the green sleeping bag from inside and drape it around her. The crew begins setting up for the next scene. Steve goes over to the fireplace and gets the actresses' comments on film for the documentary.

"I was wondering if you got that rehearsal," Paul asked Steve. "It was so funny with her not really screaming it."

There is a flurry of measuring the distance from the action to the camera. It is almost 4:30 now and very chilly.

Paul drapes his jacket around Marina as she waits for rehearsal to be announced. "Thanks."

It's not long before Marina is in the water again. Samantha asks for water and I run and bring it to her. "Maria, you're awesome."

They rehearse.

"Next time, laugh a little at the end," Paul instructs.

They almost go again.

"Camera reload."

Everything stops while more film is loaded into the camera.

"It's 4:27," Greg observes. "Gettin' dark. Gettin' cold."

Greg and Mike Lynch suddenly make like Indians. "Heya hoya, heya hoya," Mike chants. They start stamping their feet to keep warm.

"Heya hoya! Heya hoya! Hey, baby, this one's for you, Amber!" Mike theatrically yells into the boom mike.

Suddenly, a 4x4 square blows over and almost slides into the pool. Seth catches it just in time. The wind is beginning to whip up as the temperature drops.

"All right," Paul grabs Samantha and grits his teeth, imparting the intensity he wants to see from her. "Shake it out. And laugh like a maniac at the end."

Paul was pleased with the result of his efforts. "That was pretty perfect," he says at the end of the take.

Steve approaches Paul and says, "There's a lady that comes out of her house down there every time Samantha screams. We're wondering if we need some neighbor relations."

I walk out to where Steve was pointing but no one is there. *Probably calling the police*. As I am circling back around the building, a woman and her Australian lab are on the grounds. I introduce myself and tell her we're filming and invite her to watch. She comes around and smiles through the glass panes surrounding the pool area like she's seeing some entertaining animals in a zoo, and is joined by another woman with a baby. We instruct her to stand aside a little so she's not in the shot. *The film-in-process magical spell--when it works, it really works like a charm.*

The American Cinematographer Manual, a small but thick black hard cover book, sits on Paul's monitor.

Paul glances back at Mike, who almost has his head on Paul's shoulder. "I think you were breathing really loud in my ears."

"Really?"

"I think you were."

Mike holds his breath.

They do the scene again. Paul grins a devilish grin during the take. This was followed by some shots of the pool. Then, miraculously, it was a wrap.

We took relieved and excited group pictures at the pool. I helped clean up the food and the man who was overseeing us was very nice. William was told to round up all the walkie-talkies from everyone and take them back to the house and do an inventory. They had to be packed up into their cases so they could be taken back to the rental office. In the flurry, he had forgotten his black bag. As I was driving up to the house, I saw him running back down the hill. He was in tears because he was terrified he had lost it and his rings. We drove back and found the bag. On the drive back up to the house we made a short detour for him to recover. He was completely drained by the experience. Those rings mean everything to him.

Saying goodbye outside the door I hugged Steve and Marina and Wes. We'll see Wes in Portland.

We were all starting to feel like the monumental task had been completed, when a flurry started forming around the two dead trucks in the driveway. Teo had left the lights on in the grip truck. He tried to roll up the window and muttered, "fuck it." Jeff started calling around for help. Night was coming and no one was supposed to be parked there at all, let alone huge transport vehicles. *There's Selma with infrared sighting on a large sniper rifle targeting us at this very moment...*

I had had enough. Some people started to clean. A bunch of people went out to eat and celebrate. William and I crawled into bed and shut the door. Once or twice someone opened the door and shut it again. I don't remember even eating.

I woke up in the corner by the window, cold but finally having slept more than five hours. I spent the day cleaning like a maniac along with others who were still in the house. The place actually got slowly back to normal, nothing less than miraculous. Paul was cleaning away with all of us. I had to do three loads of just sheets and towels to make up for the unwelcome use of people who actually thought they were staying at the Ritz. The only thing that kept me going was the blind belief that the worst was over. We could always stop and pay for the housekeeping part. It was like holding a picture of an icon in your mind's eye in a war zone. Someone has told you there's a ceasefire in affect, but you fear an explosion in the distance will tell you otherwise. There's no proof that an armistice has been signed, but the desperate need to believe the war is over is the only thing that keeps you going.

William's face bobbed up into mine with worried eyes.

"You're slurring your words."

"Come on, let's just finish this."

I did not tell him that I had developed a fiery looking rash on my stomach and it was spreading, or he would worry more. My breathing is labored but I am trying to hide it.

We were hoping to be done in the early afternoon, but it was pushing dinnertime when we actually finished.

Diane came to inspect the place and found a few little flaws.

"There's some smudges on the wall in the bedroom, and fingerprints on the mirror in the bathroom." The art department had already gone over the walls and repaired numerous nail holes and smudges, but if the light fell a certain way, they returned like unwelcome ghosts.

The carpet cleaner had come at 9 am while William and I were in the shower. Paul offered the carpet cleaning as a gesture of good faith even though the Association always has them cleaned before the next tenant moves in. This gesture of good faith was done in part because there were sections of carpet where the cardboard had drifted aside during production that were so bad that it looked like they were used for welcome mats. It was best that Diane did not see them. She had seen enough.

There were little signs of damage that Diane didn't notice and that we didn't point out. Doug went on the roof and saw broken tiles. A tile crew found 21 broken and we have offered to replace them in addition to the carpet cleaning. I am so run down that my rash has spread around my sides. William confided in me that he was so exhausted that he afraid of having a medical emergency. We couldn't wait to get out. Everyone finally left except Doug, me, William and Paul.

We rushed out to Home Depot at Diane's request to get paint (Mars Black paint, it turned out to be) so she could touch up some nicks. All the details were eventually attended to. It was crazy. We were so relieved to leave, we were all in a state of exhaustion and profound amazement.

We stumbled into Mimi's Cafe and began to come around over dinner. We talked disjointedly about Barry Minkow, a vociferous conman who started a lucrative carpet cleaning business. Paul and Ethan knew him because they were pitching a TV show based on Barry's life. Paul was with Mike Lynch last night at a sushi dinner and the weird fact came out that Mike had never eaten fish in his life.

Andrew Harvey is in Tustin tonight. We'll be passing him as we drive away from Laguna Niguel. The conversation inevitably turned back to the film.

"I have to say a lot of this was exactly the way I imagined it. Usually there's a lot more compromise. I never got the overhead views, which we couldn't afford to get, but it was the same way in *Freak*, the shot of Keenan coming out of the mall while everyone was going in was supposed to be overhead." Paul picked up his water bottle to take a drink. "We should have had engraved water bottle caps with everyone's name on it."

"I thought that was my idea," Doug turned to Paul. "And the insert on Jennifer's bikini strap; I thought that was my idea too. But, now that I remember, you thought of that."

Paul puts on *Stay Forever* by Ween on his car stereo. William and I hold hands across the car seat, the sense of a schizophrenic crisis melting away and subtle touches reestablishing themselves as time itself relaxes, once again morphing into a benevolent force.

"I've never felt so much older than my crew," Doug shakes his head in retrospect.

"Tell me about it," William commiserates. Doug shoots him a wan grin.

"My job is not to suck the vision out of the director's brain. I like the collaboration. You're very articulate," Doug says to Paul, "like you show me all these movies that illustrate what you want."

"I like it when the actors ask questions because it helps me to go further. Like, I'll tell Marina to do something and she'll say, 'okay,' like she gets it, and it turns out that she doesn't get it at all. Then she'll ask questions, and it can be clarified."

"By the way, my sister e-mailed me something about a guy who does creature stuff to see if he has suits in his stock we can use." Doug is already preparing for the second half of the shoot, trying to finagle a low cost solution to the alien costumes.

"So, your sister's in film too?" I ask.

"She's a costume designer."

"Oh, I didn't know that."

Ween is on the stereo. We are watching the dailies back at Paul's apartment.

"Ween puts out their world. They get hooked on these themes and keep putting them out over and over again, like the stallion. They're not writing a bunch of songs separate from their experience, they're just articulating their personal world." Paul smiles openly. "I try to do that in my film, drawing on my own experience and sense of fun and the spiritual. I can actually divorce myself from the script now and see some magic in it. I couldn't while we were shooting." He pauses in thought. "Like when we were watching the dailies of scene 30, Marina turning in the driveway and walking away in the wind. I saw how profound that performance was only through the dailies, after it had been shot. I thought that again when Samantha was walking with the roller bladers swirling around her. I told her to be internal and contemplative and then to notice the beautiful world all around her. I thought, 'There she is giving me exactly

what I want.' This is really going to work, I think, this movie, it's really going to communicate some of these feelings, I think ...You know, Marina got the walks, they are the best acting that she did in the movie, and the walks are not easy."

The screen says: Life on Mars 1.85:1/ 4x3

Marina walks in a state of bliss and falls on the grass.

Then there's Gina crouching by the pool. "*There* she's got it. I'm always surprised when they get it." Paul had told Samantha that in this scene, something internal and dramatic is happening.

"Is that David Hockney or what? That is Hockney." Marina is swimming underwater, hair waving like seaweed, hands at her sides.

Then there is a hand-held shot of Gina freaking out at the pool. "She's just this blond girl, she's the kind of blond cheerleader girl I thought I'd never make a movie about. I always pictured Gina brown-haired, but I realized this works." That's what she was in real life; she had been a high school cheerleader.

Then there is a pause and a picture of people's legs; a camera reload. Then there is another camera reload. *Huh?* We all sit and stare at the television screen blankly.

"How much is a roll of 16mm film, $114? There goes 14 bucks," Paul says woefully to Doug. "And that's just to buy it. It's another $100 to process it." *Wow, he would have had a fuck of a lot more money if he had shot digital. Enough money to finish the movie, for instance? Maybe not.*

Some of the dailies are missing from the DVD that we picked up at Steve Sprung's house at about 8:30 pm.

"The dailies are in the cooler outside," Paul had said, rushing out of the car and disappearing into Steve and Victor's yard.

"I didn't know they needed to be refrigerated," I snickered. Doug laughed heartily. When we got back, I got William water and covered him in Paul's bed. He fell immediately asleep.

Out in the living room we watched the dailies. William came out after his nap and sat on the piano stool and watched too. Afterwards we spontaneously started talking about the shoot, even though it was 10:00 and everyone was exhausted. A lot was revealed.

Doug lies on his back and stretches. He rolls his neck.

"Remember in *Freak*, Doug, with you, me and Jimmy Daddabbo, everything was gold. It's not coming from you and it's not coming from me, it's gotta be coming from Jeff."

William says, "Well, I have really good hearing and the first morning I had all the walkie-talkies ready when Jeff walked in the gate. He turned to Ailee and said, 'I doubt he has any of them charged.' Not only did I have them charged, but labeled with names and sorted by departments. He should have said, 'Thank you,' given I often stayed up an extra hour to get all the bricks charged for the next morning. Considering I had never seen walkie-talkies like that until he dumped them on me the first night, the comment was totally unjustified. It really threw me off to start out that way. How does anyone think that projecting incompetence in others fosters a good working environment?"

Paul was shaking his head disappointedly.

William continued. "And then I asked Ailee for more battery sign-out sheets and she snapped, 'My computer is down. When it comes up you will get 500 of them!' Then Greg snatched the clipboard away from me and began tracing the sheet layout on the back of one of the used ones, then tosses it back while shaking his head with intolerance."

Paul made a disgusted little grunt. He's so not of that petty abrasive mentality that it's always a shock when he hears something like that.

"You aren't the only one that that energy came down on," Paul confides. "It's hurting everyone."

"Yeah," Doug answered, a perplexed look on his face. "One day we had such a great shoot, Thursday, and then Friday they were all over me about the time. I thought, 'Who decided to ride the DP about the time today?' There was no reason for it."

"I think Jeff experiences when you talk to him about some issue that you're angry, when you're not, you're never angry, you're just trying to set people up to do better the next day," Paul mused, clearly troubled and trying to understand how to work it out.

"Yes, it takes about three days on a movie shoot to get everyone in sync. I try and communicate what I need so that it goes smoothly; the next location is dressed while the prior one is being shot. Several times this did not happen and it threw everything off. We were shooting outside and then went in to go to Gina's bedroom and nothing had been done."

So that was the end of that tense conversation I overheard between Jeff and Doug that day.

"So Jeff goes, 'It will be all fixed, we'll get a second AD and another grip, and then they got Greg as second AD, and he was asking me all these creative questions at the worst possible times. He'd come up to me and say, 'Doug, I really need to understand the way this scene is shot.' and he'd do this over and over. As disappointed as I was in Hunter, he was at least useful, it was better that he was there than not. Greg is so inexperienced, if he hadn't been there at all it would have been better."

There was humor in this now, but in the heat of battle–a common phrase on a movie set–it was stressful and problematic.

Paul's eyes flashed at Doug. "Remember when we were talking about Jeff's temperament before the shoot. We wondered about a guy like that who appears so calm on the surface, but you sense a seething underneath. Teo we knew would be a problem but decided we could work with it. He has a tendency to go the flashier route. Like, I told Teo what I wanted in the garage and he said, 'See, here in the script it says that Gina's tables seem to have a life of their own, so maybe I can put all of these tools and things together all around like they're coming to life.' And I said, 'No, I just want the stuff there, it says *as if* they're coming to life.' And then later Teo said, 'I want to put more tools and stuff around,' and I couldn't get him off it."

William said, "I asked Teo the night before for the table for my physics stuff so I could start setting up and Teo told me that the table wasn't built yet. Then the next day Teo came up to me suddenly and said, 'You'll have only 15 minutes to set up.' He showed me this rickety small table that I had to repair myself with whatever tools I managed to scrounge up. I just barely got it done, when Teo came out and pushed me aside saying, "I told you to get this done earlier." Jeff, who was standing nearby glared at me and left in a huff. If it wasn't for the urgency of the moment I would have burst out laughing. I said to myself, "Did I run over their dog or something?" Then when Paul said the table had to be switched for bigger one, Teo rushed up producing a larger one like the kind he told me was non-existent. I felt really thwarted because I envisioned working on it in my usual meticulous way to make it as spectacular as possible. I was sure this was all because I didn't understand something. I couldn't believe this was because Teo, even with your blessings, didn't want me on *his* team. Someone on set told me this sort of thing happens all the time. I've dealt with big egos before, mine mostly, but this was beyond anything I had ever seen."

"You know, all this is so unnecessary, it's all just people's egos and it ends up hurting everybody and the film itself," Paul lamented. "There was this instance when Kevin was helping Amber as her boom op after Erik hurt his ankle and I was having a sound meeting with them. Kevin asked me if there was anything else I needed, and Jeff marched up and tersely commanded, 'Kevin. Go help Ailee with Crafty.' Then, Kevin turned to me and asked, 'Is that all you need?' I said, 'Yes, I'm fine,' and Jeff repeated, 'Kevin! Go help with Crafty! Right now!' He seems to think that he's not doing a good job if he's not ordering everyone around." *Ugh, another muddle caused by a lack of clear roles on set. I guess that's why they're so anal about hierarchy in the military.*

The rash is still there, lighter on my torso but faintly on my arms too now. No one knows yet. William left a note early this morning saying that he was going to get a tonic, eat, write and go to a bookstore. I want to get a tonic later; maybe it will help my rash. Paul and Doug were supposed to scout locations today and shoot some outside scenes tomorrow but the weather is not cooperating. It's raining today and is going to rain again tomorrow so the scout and shoot were called off. They only have the camera until Sunday.

My breathing is still a little labored, or, rather, if I have to talk or move fast-paced my breath catches in my lungs and my words come out in a half-breathless, squelched way. I left a message for Bridget and then talked to my mom and told her Paul got everything he wanted from the shoot– her "how is everything on Mars" update.

We had been trying to plan dinner at this raw foods restaurant. Doug's mom wrote a raw foods book at the same time as a competitor. That competitor has a restaurant in Santa Monica. We were all going to it check out later, but the scout was called off again and we had to reschedule the meal for tomorrow night.

There is a problem with Paul's heater; it smells like there is a gas leak. He called the repairman and he came to inspect it. The repairman, a Mexican, couldn't speak English very well.

"Es peligro?" Paul asked, in his broken Spanish. "Is that right, peligro?" he turns aside and whispers to me.

"Yes, peligro," I answer.

The repairman assured Paul it wasn't dangerous in his broken English, and then he left.

Paul had been on the phone all morning, his college friend Ellis and then Alec, the casting director for the film had called. Ellis is finishing up the second edition to *The Better World Handbook* and an ecological shopping guide called *Shopping for a Better World.* He may be able to make a visit to the set during the second half of the shoot. I had some time to catch up my friend Bridget, who is also an investor in the film. I filled her in on my latest experience.

It turns out that Paul's heater is broken. The guy came back, turned it off and left. Paul called the maintenance people and they said it'll be fixed Monday. He has a space heater, and Anna Lisa is bringing over some heavy blankets. My bones feel such a deep need to be warm; I don't want to wait any longer.

Paul had rescheduled the excursion to the raw foods restaurant, Juliano's Raw. Apparently, there was some confusion as to whether Doug's sister could make it tonight and it turned out that tomorrow was better, so tomorrow it is.

Paul went in to the kitchen to make a pizza and I turned on the microwave to heat up an Asian noodle bowl and the oven and microwave both went dead. We all just stared at each other in piqued surrender. Paul called maintenance and told them. Then we went into the bedroom and I realized that he had a space heater on. They use a lot of energy and with the other appliances on the same circuit there was a chance we blew a fuse. William went downstairs and found the fuse box and fixed it. Paul called back and told maintenance that it was okay.

I felt like I needed rest, warmth and a good movie, so Paul showed me *Ponette*. William went out again; it turned out to be a nice sunny day. *Ponette* addresses the same issues as we address as adults; issues of life, death, faith and hope, except the actors are all very talented four-year-olds.

Now that we can all collapse, I finally broke the news about my rash to William. He's worried; he says it has all the signs of shingles and it appeared because my immune system is seriously compromised. I felt this coming for many months while waiting for the turbulent process of the film coming together to turn into anything that I could definitively plan for. He thinks I am trying to do too much. I like the warlike pace in some ways; it's a relief from working like a robot, day after day. We talk about this and the competitive nature of L.A., then William and I turn in early and sleep in Paul's bed. Paul and Doug watch the dailies out in the living room, then Paul went to spend the night at Anna Lisa's and Doug crashed in the living room.

As my eyes open, I am aware of William's eyes on me. He reads me a beautiful poem that he found yesterday. It hurts him a lot to see me so sick, and looks at me with protective and caring eyes. William and I are going to Erewhon to get healing tonics.

We walk through the Pan Pacific Park. I look around and, with a jolt, find myself seeing into the history of the landscape. *There was a time when there were just these hills with this climate and its beautiful sunshine and deep blue skies. There was a time when there was no trace of man on the land or in the air, and it was not so very long ago. What have we done?* I was very aware of the littleness of myself and the largeness of the sky, and was amazed that my feet were taking me forward on the grass and my head could turn left and right so that my cheeks could lift themselves to the sun and my eyes could behold any chosen manifestation of nature at my will. The buildings and sidewalks and vehicles seemed unfortunate, off track from what I felt, from what I was, and yet my eyes could choose to behold them too, at a whim.

At the destination of this journey, the tonic bar, I explained to Rose about my rash and squelched breathing and described my recent situation. She made me a tonic with 18 capsules in it. It was thick and grainy and made my breathing ailment disappear. William's stomach ailment is almost gone again; it was gone before the shoot after he drank a few tonics, totally gone. He's starting to believe it's not serious. My body is so unbalanced I got diarrhea from drinking the tonic on an empty stomach (though that's ideally what you are supposed to do) and had to throw out my underwear and wash my pants. William said that it could have been part of a healing crisis. Sometimes, these tonics cause the body to purge the toxins out in a dramatic way. I did a load of laundry when we got home and watched dailies, feeling better overall. I asked William, "Do you think you can put your rings back on yet?"

He consulted himself for a brief moment. "Yes."

"You do?" I said with eagerness.

I jumped up and cleaned all four of our rings with soap and a toothbrush and we put them on each others' fingers again all sparkling and cleansed, gazing ritually into each others' eyes. Then I took a nap and William called about jobs waiting for him back in Portland.

Poor Paul did not make it through the shoot unscathed either. He has tension in his neck and upper back that has become very painful and he could hardly move. *Holding all the weight on your shoulders, aren't you?* William started to massage it out with skilled deliberation.

"His hands are magic," Paul said to me, amazed. William will work on him some more when we get back from dinner at Juliano's Raw.

On the drive over, William discusses the woods setting for his scenes in the film with Paul. He's worried about being portrayed as some burned-out meth addict type by Teo, rather than an alchemical hermit with possibly alien connections, both because Teo doesn't understand the film's subtle alchemical message and doesn't strike William as someone who easily forgives and forgets. William said he envisions his tent neatly zen-like and filled with mystical objects. Paul let Samantha and Marina have a say in what was in their rooms and wants William to help design his own tent. It always helps if the space feels more authentic to the actors. William says there's a common cultural misunderstanding that hippie communes were always messy. The two he lived on back in the '60's were anything but. "Sometimes I would wake up and think I was on a Kurosawa set. Everything was so rustically beautiful, what the Japanese call, '*wabi-sabi*.' If Toshiro Mifune walked in and sat down to share a bowl of sake, I wouldn't have batted an eye."

Of course, Teo had difficulties allowing the actor's preference to be an element of his set design. He kept demanding retakes if he didn't like the look of something. If Paul felt the set was okay that should have been all that mattered. Teo tended to keep score– "If Doug can have another take then why can't I?" To that, Paul firmly replied, "Because if it's too dark there's no image on the film. And if there's no image, there's no movie!"

Paul says the location in the woods might change. They met with a guy who's writing a book about mushrooms today and he says he'll let us use his land for the shoot. This is a good thing because Oscar, the owner of the original location, is thinking of selling his property.

We arrive at Juliano's Raw, a chic, overpriced healthy restaurant with modern ambient lightning and starlet-hopeful waitresses. A woman with glowing skin and ebullient manners meets us there; she turns out to be Laura, Doug's younger sister.

"Hi, Goober! Good to see you! How's it going with the film?"

Goober?

"Goober?" Paul chuckled. "Is that what she calls you?"

"Cut it out. You didn't hear that," Doug looked embarrassed. *He's definitely not a Goober, for God's sake.*

Laura lives in New York City too and is Doug's neighbor. They used to be roommates. She's a costume designer in film and theater.

Steve and Victor meet us as well. Steve bears a rose quartz magic wand, mystically withdrawing it from a pocket and presenting it to us. Victor gave it to him, and he cherishes it.

It was ironic that in the middle of this healthy restaurant we all spontaneously start sharing our post-production ailments.

"Oh my God, Friday night I went to sleep and we were going to do that location scout Saturday but cancelled due to the weather and then, suddenly, I just felt dead. I couldn't speak, I slurred my words," Paul sagged as he said this.

"I was totally dead too, I couldn't believe how tired I was," Doug shook his head as if not wanting to remember.

"And then today at about 4:30 my back just tensed up and I couldn't move," Paul glanced at William as he spoke, "and William helped me. His hands are magic."

"There was a knot on your back and I felt an unpleasant sting in my thumb when I pressed on it. I will work on that meridian again by using my magnetic pucks on it tonight."

"This is my wound from the Nazgul," said Frodo with the big blue eyes.

Our food comes and we share some samples around. I got a burrito in a cabbage leaf. It was very good but such a small portion and I couldn't afford to order more. We drank fresh coconut juice from a coconut that we ate afterwards.

Laura began to tell us of some of her experiences working on films. She works with John Favro, who did *Elf*. She's about to work on the *John Carter Stories* by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Paul and Ethan are thinking about working towards being the writers.

She also did the costume design for Woody Allen's *Anything Goes*. She found working with him to be interesting, but there were some difficulties. She would offer multiple options for a costume and they would still ask, "Is there more?" They told her that they were overall happy with her work, but still acted as if they wanted something that they weren't seeing.

William was advising Steve and Victor about the sulfur smell in their 550 foot well on their land in New Mexico when Laura turned to Paul and asked, "How does he know so much?"

Earlier, William told her of his extensive research and experience in natural construction and cabinet making and Laura wants his help when she builds her house. William connects deeply with Victor over their shared perception of the pettiness and superficiality in Hollywood, both of them being, for the most part, outsiders who can see these things more clearly from the outside, looking in. William was a hit telling stories; he is an entertainer at heart. Steve and

Victor took their leave early because Victor works tomorrow. He's a database warehouse manager for a hospital. We dropped Doug off at Michel's place and went home. William gave Paul a back massage using lotion and a magnetic puck of his own design. We went to bed much later than we should have, about 12:30 pm.

In the morning, maintenance came to fix the heat. Paul, William and I sat on Paul's bed and had a talk about the extreme disrespect that was flying around on set. At one point, Teo had thrown a water bottle that almost hit William in the head and then denied it. Paul listened and embraced William's experience. The maintenance man left and another came and inspected the work. William inspected it as well and said it was fixed, both the heat and the vent. The warmth came back. I smiled, exhausted but relieved. We locked hands three ways.

Dave, Paul's lawyer, sent the release form Paul had been anticipating for three weeks. Paul immediately called Bryan to begin to move on *Something Happened* and Toby, Bryan's assistant in Australia, called Paul back.

Kevin Hatfield's $5,000 for *Life on Mars* came this morning; it was the FedEx package Paul thought he was going to have to pick up. Paul told Kevin that they needed to raise $35,000 more.

Paul and Steve will splice together a trailer and recruit investors for the second half of the film. Paul is also thinking that if he can get Bryan and Doug to meet while Doug is still here, it might help sell the idea of Doug being Paul's choice for DP for *Something Happened*.

Paul had asked Jimmy Daddabbo, the producer on *Freak,* to work on *Life on Mars* first but he had another job and couldn't do it. He also asked Chris Aronoff, who did come on board in a less time-consuming role, and a girl named Imelda, and others before he found Jeff. Paul and Jeff had talked about the shoot and evaluated the performances of the production team. From Jeff's perspective, Michel had too much of an inclination for diddling with his cell phone and hanging out with the actresses, and said that this should be addressed before the second half of the shoot. Jeff recounted that he ended up loading his van with props after the shoot because everyone else had flown the coop before the work was done. Jeff stayed to oversee cleanup till the bitter end, exhausted and stumbling like the rest of us.

I crashed out on the couch, heart beating rapidly and palpitating. Paul crashed in his bedroom and William, though exhausted, went out to get an elixir. We all feel a close group again.

Paul said that Greg wouldn't be back as second AD. Paul recalled that when he was less experienced himself, he saw the position of second AD as more of a policeman too, and this is not helpful. Paul told production that Seth didn't communicate to the different departments what was going on as someone in his position was supposed to, but he didn't have confidence that they could find anyone better and would rather have Seth than get someone who was deficient in a different or worse way. He certainly didn't want an inexperienced snapping policeman or someone with anger management issues. He said a lot of the crew would probably be different for the second half of the shoot. Much of the crew didn't understand the spiritual nature of the script and were using the job solely as a credit on their resume. It's not unusual for many crew members to not read the script.

Paul tried to renew his unemployment claim and discovered he couldn't until July. I dialed the office for him and eventually got through and waited on hold and handed him the phone when a representative came on. *Not the usual role most people would expect for a director's assistant.*

"When I was younger I thought *Freak* was a stepping stone to other things, but now I don't see that at all. I really don't even expect to make any more movies. I'm doing it because my heart and spirit won't let me not."

I myself have not worked at my paid job for a month. It's totally amazing. I have lost all concept of time. We all have. We often don't know what day it is until we look it up or reference it to some time in the past.

Tomorrow is Ethan's birthday.

"You're severely dehydrated. I can tell by your skin." William notices with a look of concern.

Five or ten minutes go by.

With effort, I reach out for my water bottle and drink. There is a short pause between my drink and William's sincere voice.

"Thank you."

When I got back from Trader Joe's, William, Paul and Jeff were at Paul's apartment. Paul had given me $40 for groceries for all of us. Jeff had brought over the air mattress without a leak for Doug. He's driving up to Portland to see an ex-girlfriend. Mike Lynch and Greg are on their way to show Paul some production stills. Paul is on the phone with his college friend Lee Gabay.

Mike starts showing the stills.

"Ha!" Paul exclaimed. "You know, Tom Trail did a documentary and Big C was in it. Wait till I show these to Tom. The one picture I saw from his documentary was of Big C." He continued to flip through the stills. "And rumor has it that Big C smokes pot, drinks and watches DVD's while he drives. Jesse said to him, 'Let me know what streets you usually drive on so I can avoid them.' Ha ha!"

In one of the stills Marina and Paul are lying on the grass and Marina has put headphones on Paul. The song was John Lennon singing *Strawberry Fields* on a session track from the *Beatles Anthology*. Marina says she uses it to get into a deep state. Paul said, "Me too!" Paul is pleased with the stills. "All of these are good."

Paul says we are now all at Rivendell after Frodo is stabbed and is recovering. We went to bed really early.

We slept really late. William left early to get an elixir and I was to meet him at the LACMA museum that is just a mile or two from Paul's. We finally tracked each other down on the grounds. I was waiting by a back entrance instead of the front. It turns out that the rock and mineral exhibit we were searching for was at the Natural History Museum by USC. We had to take a bus immediately because returning from there at night wouldn't have been safe. As it was, it was an experience. After a short while, we didn't hear a single word of English. And from the views whizzing by, we could have been in another country. First, it looked like Korea. Then it was Mexico. And finally, it became some indeterminate third-world country. All of this, in just forty blocks!

The exhibit is beautiful and extensive. We practically had the place to ourselves. We sat on a bench, leaning against each other and watched a video of Minas Gerais and Columbian gems. We were in our element again and enraptured and wanting to buy plane tickets to Brazil. "All of the spectacular gems come from Minas Gerais."

In a little alcove there is a "meteorite from Mars." It's the Los Angeles meteorite, found October 30, 1999 at Sunland, California. All around us are spectacular sights: a huge pocket of quartz and tourmaline, a huge green tourmaline specimen with hundreds of smaller ones sprouting from it, a piece of hematite that looks like a brain, emeralds, sapphires, black opals and a 28 carat cut tanzanite of my favorite purple/blue that took my breath away.

A label caught my eye: Is there Life on Mars? It read, "In 1996 a Martian meteorite found at Allan Hills in Antarctica in 1984 (ALH84001) was reported to have evidence of possible life on Mars dating to about 3.6 billion years ago. NASA scientists reported microscopic structures that appear to be fossils, in close association with an apparently unique pattern of organic molecules that are the basis of life and several unusual mineral phases that are known products of primitive microscopic organisms on Earth. Further investigations have cast serious doubts on this interpretation."

We left the museum at dusk and were wary at the bus stop. We watched *Alien* that night, and shared our adventures at the museum. When William and I are in a place like that, the whole world disappears except for our two childlike consciousnesses drinking in the wonder of our surroundings and of each other's experience. We slept late, and went out to lunch with Ethan at Swingers for his birthday. Paul shared the good news that Michael Scher, formerly of Emerge, invested $5,000 in the film.

I learn that there's a highly publicized British show coming out called *Life on Mars,* and in order to avoid being confused with it and any copyright red tape, the film may need to be retitled.

Paul showed us the musical episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which Loni Peristere and his company, Zoic, does the special effects for. Paul likes *Buffy* because the feels that they take the medium of television and use it to express their creativity just like Disney or the people who created Bugs Bunny.

"There is a touch of *Buffy* in *Life on Mars*," Paul confesses. "It's one of the inspirations, though I didn't want them to be compared. I was a little wary of casting a tough, pretty blond lead because of it. *Life on Mars* is much more about the true nature of divine love and the fires of transformation."

The expenses for the first half of the shoot were $45,000. This was only slightly over budget.

"Your kidneys are run down," Randy said as he examined my eyes at the Chinese tonic bar. He began fixing me a tonic. William sat beside me, sipping his contentedly. Truth pulled out a small dropper bottle hidden in a drawer behind him and brandished it before us with a gleam in his eye like the Taoist sage that he is.

"This is Heaven Grade Wild Ginseng. It's unlike anything else you have ever tried."

He pulled out two shot glasses, put some purified water in each and squeezed some of the contents from a dropper. We drank it, and it instantly made us feel, not buzzed, but *healthier*. It's only $350 per bottle. William had been very generous with his knowledge of medicinal mushrooms, and this was a gift directly from Truth's personal stash. It was a most generous act and we felt particularly blessed walking back to the bus stop.

I helped William pack up and Paul took us to ship his three boxes back to Portland by UPS. When he was safely dropped off at the airport, with a big hug and kiss from me, Paul and I stopped at Bob's Big Boy on Riverside Drive and Rose Street in Burbank where David Lynch used to eat a lot. I had a veggie melt and Paul had grilled cheese and tomato. Paul is the proud owner of a Bob's Big Boy statue that is signed by David Lynch.

Tonight Paul and I are going to Steve's to view some of the dailies that Mike Lynch has dubbed the sound into. Paul didn't eat much at Bob's, handing me a third of his grilled cheese sandwich. I ask him why.

"I feel weirded out, I don't know."

He's about to see the first clips of the dailies actually taking shape as a film.

"Watching *Show Me Love* last night kind of depressed me. I don't know if I got performances that good. And the beginning of *Heavenly Creatures* is so powerful and raw."

"There was a murder at the beginning of *Heavenly Creatures*. There's no murder at the beginning of *Life on Mars*."

Paul looks at me with a soft snort as if to say, 'well, of course I understand that,' but I know he means that he's striving for something equally as moving.

"Thanks for communicating that to me. I get it," I clarify my thoughts to him. "You as the creator will never be satisfied with the product. But people viewing it from the outside will be. I go through stages like that with my writing. I keep adding tangents to clarify it and make it more descriptive, but there's no end to doing that and it just ends up divergent and cluttered."

"Yeah, we've talked about that with your work."

"I guess for you, you're experiencing this as the first stages of the movie taking shape as a real film."

"It's the first time people outside it will be viewing it and either it will work for them or it won't."

I suddenly felt his vulnerability, he seemed full of so much of a vision and a burden, all of those people working for him, all the money painstakingly raised, all the time devoted to the project with no certainty of an outcome at all, let alone a successful one. The production process fast-forwarded through my feelings, the kind little being with the big blue eyes who set this all in motion up against a moment of trial. Something in me covertly broke down, I needed to do something, to protect him or fortify him. It was just the big sister and little brother archetypes standing there in that moment for me, not Maria and Paul. I took the check, outwardly calm. "This is on me."

"Why are you getting that?"

It's all I could think of to do and I want to show you support.

"It's your big night."

Paul smiled at me with brotherly eyes. "It's my big night and tomorrow is your big day. That will be on me." He was referring to our trip to Disneyland.

I paid the bill, an inadequate gesture for my feelings, but we were already off, past the moment, though it lingered with me.

On the way to Steve's, Paul starts singing. I join in, because although he made up the song, I know some of the words. Paul's name for Souplantation, a local buffet soup and salad bar, is "shit-fuck-ass-crap."

"Ha ha! I'm going to write that down! It will be in the book!"

It's sung to the tune of *We're Off to See the Wizard* from *The Wizard of Oz*.

We're off to shit-fuck-ass-crap
where all of the food tastes like crap
Where lettuce is grown on pesticide ground
and all of the water's from tap
If in your face you want a slap

you'll get it at shit-fuck-ass-crap
but Stas and Julie they are both insane
for subjecting themselves to that.
We're off to shit-fuck-ass-crap
the horrible shit-fuck-ass-craaaaaap!

This was Paul teasing Stas for eating at Souplantation, a buffet soup and salad bar where you pay one price and it's all-you-can-eat. You can look in the L.A. Weekly and get coupons and eat for a discount, so Stas would get a bunch of L.A. Weeklys and rip out the coupons and eat there, which is not the weirdest thing in the world until you find out that he ate there *every single day for three or four years straight.* So, therefore, he earned the song.

"This is great because of what Marina brilliantly does after Samantha leaves. If you watch, Marina pulls a stray strand of hair off her cheek and pushes it back with attitude," Paul informs us with eager glee.

Samantha and Marina are standing at the pool with the sign, "Pool Closed" hanging on the gate. Marina retrieves a credit card from her purse and hands it nonchalantly to Samantha, who steps up to the gate and slides it through the crack to open it illegally. Marina looks at Samantha deadpan, crossing her arms with attitude.

"I won't tell you what takes I like because I don't think that will help you," Steve says.

"You can. Do whatever you want."

There's no sound yet because Mike couldn't get it to work.

"There is a difference between cutting the footage for a movie and cutting it for a promo," Steve was saying.

"The plant scene and scene 50 wouldn't go in the promo," said Paul. "Oh my God, that's awesome!" The scene with the man on the park bench watching the car race between Jesse and Big C is playing. The man has a dog next to him, and the dog swivels his head to watch the cars zip by in sync with the man.

Victor and his friends Timothy and David, who are visiting from Detroit, come in with a flair and see Paul, Steve, Mike and I crowded around Steve's elaborate editing equipment. We're watching the footage on a 19-inch TV with numbers running above and below the frame,

marking where the shot is on the roll of film. Steve's editing room has three flat screen monitors and seven visible hard drives of 60 gigabytes each.

"Hello. Good to see you," Paul greets Timothy warmly. Timothy introduces himself to Mike.

"I'm Maria, Paul's sister," I smile in greeting.

"I can see that," Timothy answers with a warm, disproportionate conviction that can only be a reference to our twin-like appearance. Everyone laughs.

"How did you shoot that scene?"

"We used both lanes of a two-lane street."

"Did you have them close off the street for you?"

"No, we did it illegally."

"You did?"

"She did," Paul indicated me with his eyes.

"I did it."

"Whoa."

"The movie *Alien* has shots where everyone is completely natural and you're looking at people talking out of focus. There are scenes in there that are as good as in any art film."

"I wanted a shot with water flowing around the curb after the car accident but it was too time consuming with the tension of getting caught," Paul was saying.

I took a moment to call William and tell him that we were looking at the beginnings of a film.

"*Stalker, 2001, The Mirror,* those aren't movies," Steve was saying to Paul as I walked back in the room.

"No, they're the source of my soul's inspiration, the source of my being's reason for existence, my spiritual practice, everything." Paul's calm certainty was utterly sincere. "When Antonioni was filming *Blowup*, he painted buildings, doors, changed everything in his environment until it was exactly the right color. That's how conscious of color he was. It was his second color film." The scenes on the screen grab Paul's attention visibly. "I can't believe it. It looks like the cleanest house ever, I mean, we know we did it."

"But it's still shocking. There was crap everywhere. I took some footage of all that crap," I said, mesmerized too.

"Which we'll never show Judy," Paul said in reference to the owner of the Laguna Niguel house. "She'll just think, oh, we must have moved some shit around." Paul shook his head slowly with transfixed amazement. "Ha! There're some great shots in this. Look at her, she's doing such a good job!" Marina is walking under the influence of Samantha's potion. The perspective flicks to a close-up.

"I like that blue on the table."

"Yes, because it's now an altar. It's now become an altar and she's doing magic." There is a glass pan full of crystals Samantha grew and she's reading excerpts from the Rumi poem.

The scene with Jesse and Samantha at the kitchen table where Samantha advises Jesse on love, "Shh! Don't tell anyone!" evokes a positive reaction from Paul. "I'm very pleased with that, he looks like a real person."

Paul seems more relaxed now that he's seen that the acting carries some genuine emotion and that the story keeps the audience engaged.

"That's so weird. What's this movie going to be?"

"I don't know," Steve answers Paul, with wonder.

"But it's going to be good."

"I'm letting it be. I don't want to impose my will on it," the experienced editor says sagely.

"There's a lot of awesomeness already," Paul says happily.

I look up from my notes. "Oh my God! That's beautiful!"

The Sally Mann shot of Samantha lying on the bed with lace and colorful covers arranged around her and her hair meticulously splayed like a golden mane around her head flashes on the screen.

"This room was a mess. The Sally Mann book was always on the monitor," Steve recalls, adjusting the color on the screen for Paul's benefit.

"Most of the scene plays out in their eyes. There's very little dialogue." Samantha and Trevor exchange a series of knowing looks in close-up after Marina dies. The grey ring in Samantha's eyes stands out; her large green eyes and long lashes are striking.

"He's good," Paul says of Trevor's acting. "You just have to tone him down and he's good."

The footage ends and Paul sits back, relieved.

"I've seen all there is to see. And I'm very happy." Steve and Mike look pleased and proud. "I'm released," Paul blows an exaggerated sigh of relief. "And I'm starving. Now I just have to raise $35,000." He laughs at himself. "I feel like we have a lot of prospects to raise it quickly."

Chapter 8

R & R

The Beatles album *Abbey Road* came out four days before Paul was born and four days after his good friend Lee Gabay was born. It's Paul's favorite Beatles album, and he calls himself and Lee "*Abbey Road* babies." *Abbey Road* is playing over Paul's car stereo as we drive into Anaheim, and then he switches it to *Fantasmic!* as we enter the Disneyland drive. When we park, he reads from William Irwin Thompson's *The American Replacement of Nature* and *Pacific Shift*. Thompson speaks about the unconventional, but genuine undercurrent of occult preoccupation America has with Disneyland. There's an almost religious aura surrounding Disneyland and the characters that represent it, though there is, interestingly, no predetermined religious agenda, no punishing for sins or striving for Nirvana; Disneyland is non-denominational, a place where you can go to feel safe in the streets and allow archetypes to wash through you as you surrender to the rides that help produce the prerequisite psychological state.

Though we're both in our thirties, we share the magic in this trip. That's why he's giving me this trip to Disneyland as a belated Christmas gift, and taking the time and attention to detail to be a guide for me through the experience. The trip we took to Disney World in Florida when we were children was a self-proclaimed turning point in Paul's life.

"In that period of my life before age 12, by far the two most influential experiences were seeing the film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and going to Disney World. You find the things that resonate to your frequency, and those things make the biggest impression on you and become milestones in your life and development. At Disney World, I clearly remember walking down Main Street and straight into the castle. I remember going to the archway of the castle and

hearing a fantasy-like choral music. It was healing and somehow deeply inspiring. I've always loved castles; they evoke something archetypal, deep. Sleeping Beauty floated on the wall with a dragon, breathing fire. I remember seeing that and hearing music magically flowing out of nowhere. I had never experienced anything like it before! The total awe that I felt at that moment can't be put into words; it pulled me into an entirely different dimension. The Electric Light Parade was a dazzling cavalcade of colors. I'd never seen flowing, fluorescent lights so perfectly matched to electronic music before. Each of these things had as much personality as each of the floats. Like the big turtle guy, he was more real and distinct than some of the personalities in my so-called normal life!

"I believed that these creatures were real in the same way I believe cinema is real. We do what God does in our own limited human way. God created us to believe we can create whatever we want with the gifts of imagination we're given. Spiritual people use their creative urge to give birth to beautiful visions. Creativity can evoke higher intelligent beings like the movie *2001* does and like the crystalline beings that Bill Thompson spoke of. They're crystalline beings that communicate with the crystal music in harmony with the earth's natural resonance, and that's exactly what the Light Parade is. Now we have electricity and lights that make the colors of nature seem not as amazing to us. Aldous Huxley talks about how omnipresent neon lights condition us now but primitive man saw the amazing, transient colors of flowers and worshiped them. We have to recover the pristine state of wonder to get back into the full childlike experience of color and lights and sound as magic. The Light Parade was channeling those higher intelligences and dimensions and continues to inspire me to this day."

Paul seems to glow, teleported into a shamanic state of consciousness as he finds himself back in the midst of these wonders. He continues in his lucid ramble, "I wanted to choose a life in which I can express my version of this rather than choose a life of having kids and owning land. As an artist that's my goal. My goal isn't to try to help people or heal the world. My deepest desire is to express the visions I have and have faith they will resonate with people and heal. I don't judge. How they affect the world in a positive way is up to the divine. Forcing agendas into your art never works. All you can do is express who you are. The farther you are along your spiritual journey the more you get from everything. As David Lynch puts it, 'If you have a golf ball-sized consciousness, you'll have golf ball-sized views of the world. If you have a basketball-sized consciousness, then you have a basketball-sized perception of the world.'

Disney World and the Light Parade put me on a kick of technology, hence the eventual vision of my New Art Form. The New Art Form is a new form of technology, a virtual reality spiritual experience of life, death and rebirth that I am envisioning as the future of my work. The only way to get people vulnerable is to open them some way. A technology that offers something that people haven't seen before is more likely to be a catalyst for opening the spirit than working in a familiar medium, like cinema.

"Another huge thing for me was sitting in this fantasy land ride and letting a vehicle take me away. And there were black lights! I had never seen one before. You're really taken into a soul-dimension, seeing in a new way beyond your two eyes. As it takes you from room to room there's a feeling of surrender, because you're not controlling it. It has to be the same way with movies. When I watch a film, I want to be in the mind of the filmmaker with all his flaws and inspirations for better or for worse. Meditation work is also all about surrender and trust. If you do have it, I hope it's the most amazing thing ever. The experience of death is evoked on a ride because you're being taken somewhere and asked to trust. I feel that my trusting and loving relationship with God is why I feel cozy on Space Mountain.

"In the next couple years following Disneyworld all I could think about was that. When was the soonest I could do it again, 18, I guess. Mom and Dad wouldn't give me money for it so I had to save my own money and I did it, that was the crazy thing. Here I am at Disneyland. And of course it's not an end but a means to an end to serve my own spiritual journey and my art. I didn't know how to integrate that experience, it was the same with the film *Close Encounters,* but it all works out.

"I think you have an integrated life if you look back to when you were five and realize that's who you are and then trace how it manifests in your adult life. You have to know who you are first before you can go on to have a life in inter-relationship with others and the world. Forces in society will pull to condition you to become dichotomized into trying to find the next stage of life when it's always close at hand, inside you. You have to know *that* 'you.'"

"You're absolutely right," I feel so fond of Paul, as he's speaking of my soul as well. We have read many of the same books and share the same knowledge base.

As if by magic, we find ourselves in front of the Snow White shrine.

Paul indicates it with glee, "That is in *Life on Mars.* I stole it from the album cover of Kate Bush's *Never Forever.* The girl on the beach lifts her dress on Marina's poster and from her flows the Water of Life so Ricky Rat can swim in it."

In the line for Space Mountain we get behind a couple that is in their forties and don't seem to have any children with them. It turns out that they are from Eugene, Oregon and are doing exactly the same thing that Paul and I are; sharing the experience of Disneyland from an adult perspective. We share a moment of conspiratorial delight.

Out of the blue, Paul jokingly recites a scene from the movie *Batman,* playing both voices, the voice of Batman rapid, monotonous and robotic.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Batman."

"Are you going to kill me?"

"No, but I want you to tell your friends about me."

He laughs boyishly, then begins to repeat himself.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Batman."

"Are you going to kill me?"

"No, but I want you to kill your friends."

He rapidly fires off several verses, each more bizarre than the last.

"Who are you?"

"I'm not Batman."

"Are you going to kill me?"

"No, but I'm going to kill myself."

We joke around in the long lines, get in and ride, then sprint to the next. Along the way we get Disneyland food– hot dogs and large, soft pretzels and cheese, to eat while we wait for the next experience. We stake out our place on the pavement to watch *Fantasmic!* The spectacular show of live actors performing on boats on a pond and projected images on a curtain of spurting water creates, well, a new art form. As darkness falls upon one world, it explodes here upon another.

This is Paul's analysis of *Fantasmic!* as relayed in a spontaneous essay of his own words:

Fantasmic! begins like a dream. After waiting by the rivers of America, and enjoying the dim, flickering gas lights speckled by the waterside, and listening to the live Dixieland jazz float by on the barge, and perhaps enjoying the fireworks in the sky, the lights finally go out. And, like mystical beings, the lighting towers on Tom Sawyer Island rise from the ground to greet us; they are the technology that will bring us the show. We cheer and salute them; pay our respects to the technology, for it is TECHNOLOGY that gives us the means for the experience we're about to have; technology which makes this age-old story of the human drama resonate so powerfully, only the technology, guided by the mystical artist, can reach the masses and do the work of elevating consciousness.

Mickey appears; our Spirit Guide, our Soul ... Mickey is us. He's about to take us on THE human journey. The word "Imagination" is sung. That's what this is all about. Our ability to Imagine; to tap into the Universal Soul; the Godhead; to know our past, our future, and all things by being what we are: God. But for now, we are just blind humans. And our journey begins.

The first image that appears projected on the water is Mickey from *Fantasia* as the Sorcerer's apprentice; young, ignorant, but in recent possession of a magic hat that gives him sorcerer's powers. This hat, of course, is like a drug; like a dose of Ecstasy or LSD; it gives us a temporary glimpse at our powers and potentials as divine human beings. But, like a drug, it's a gift not fully understood and certainly one Mickey cannot fully control (just like, when we do drugs, we can't control our mental imagery; we just get examples of what it feels like to be in the Higher Consciousness.) So Mickey plays with his new divine human powers and starts to demand, in a dream, that the stars obey his commands. He playfully calls them down; they obey. They swirl around him, burst and shower beautifully. Mickey's in heaven. This is the end of the imagery from this sequence for now, but we know the full story of the sorcerer's apprentice -— Mickey can't control this power and it gets him into big trouble. When he wakes he realizes the magic spell he cast on the broomstick has spiraled out of control.

So the first step is to show us a bit of what our potential as human beings could possibly be – it's the marvelous world around us, and the possibilities of what we can do in that world that come to us in dreams– but we haven't earned it; it isn't real. But it piques our interest.

It's very important to note that this example of Mickey demonstrating the fully realized divine human potential is done in a TWO-DIMENSIONAL image projected on a screen of watery mist, and is contextually a DREAM that Mickey is having– thus, this is the VISION of the human potential, given to him at the BEGINNING of the journey. Now comes the work; now comes the pain and struggle and ordeal, before he can actually realize it in the flesh, in the three-dimensional world.

Next we see truly beautiful and mystical imagery of colored flowers slowly opening. This is the flower in each of our hearts opening up; accepting the world with compassion; opening up to our deep compassion for all things. Only after we open our hearts and minds can we truly begin our journey into the world. Otherwise we can go to the four corners of the earth and not really SEE anything that is in front of us. With open heart, we are primed to properly see (and being neophytes, we see and slowly start to learn; note that we are not fully SEEING in the way one of fully birthed Higher Consciousness would, but we are beginning to. We just need to go through Ordeal before we can really birth into the new being which is our True Selves).

The flowers open, our hearts open, and then three barges float by sporting flaming torches and brightly-colored dancing apes. This is the First Man; just like the apes in *2001: A Space Odyssey* who have just become human, only here, it is by having been given the gift of human compassion; the opening of the heart, instead of the ability to use weapons. So we begin with the dawn of man, and the human journey is embarked upon. Thus, with human consciousness, we look around ... and we start to see wild, almost demented things! Colored elephants with stripes and polka dots dancing with each other, rubbing their backs with lightning bolts, blowing whole new elephants out of their trunks! Are we tripping? No! The world is MAD, demented! When one starts to really See, one sees that the true reality is...well, psychedelic! It's crazy, divine nonsense, and it's quite wonderful.

We are visited then by a Pinocchio sequence; we are reminded of ordeals undertaken by other characters; the characters we know well that make up not only our cultural identity but our internal theater— the dramas that make up our social and spiritual perceptions of our world.

After Pinocchio; Peter Pan. Then the barges carrying the lovers – Beauty and her Beast, The Little Mermaid and her Prince, Snow White and her Prince. They dance. The drama of love and romance, of hesitation and delicious surrender, of "happily ever after" is played out before us. The marriage of the masculine and the feminine archetypes are displayed for us, and it's utterly beautiful; it's Divine. What is being shown to us is our Great Purpose distilled all in one simple image: the unity of the masculine and the feminine. This is the goal of life (and by "life" I mean literally life. In the True Reality, in the dimension of the Godhead, there is no life – life is a limitation – an illusion we have in this physical dimension only). In this physical dimension, the goal of "life" is to unify the masculine and the feminine, and thus the final stage is complete before total immersion into Godhead. Why is this the final stage? Because it was the first separation of Godhead from itself – the first split was when God created a vessel for Himself to give to, and thus masculine and feminine were birthed.

Another interpretation of this is the Garden of Eden. In the beginning, when this illusionary universe began (and keep in mind when I say "illusionary" I am only referring in comparison to the actual True nature of Reality; the unity of the dimension of the Godhead; the One Energy, the One Light Energy that is all things and everything. In comparison to that, the physical world is a kind of illusion, but it's also very much a reality because it's like a painting – we look at a landscape in a painting and see that it is not actually a real mountain, yet it is a real painting of a mountain! It's a reality that is all part of the greater Reality. So that's what I mean by "illusionary"), it was like a Garden of Eden, with the male and the female living in perfect bliss and unity – overjoyed, in fact, with the newness of the "separation" game. Before, they had both been part of God – one big love energy. Now, they can inhabit (illusory) bodies and actually love each other and see their own love reflected back at them through the eyes of the other! What a marvelous game! And the bodies are designed perfectly for each other, with the pleasure of what it is to be God concentrated brilliantly in their sexual organs, and this "God" is experienced most completely in the game of sexual intercourse. So for a while, it is all joy and sensual discovery and pure bliss experience.

But this joyous unity, this divinity is not so easily acquired, enjoyed, or sustained. For this "happily ever after" occurs on the heels of what? Of evil. The darkness of forgetting our

Source, where we really came from, and that we are in actuality living in the painting and not in the True Reality. That separation was a game to allow ourselves (which is God) to enjoy ourselves (God) in a more colorful variety of ways. However, we are intended to forget, for without Ordeal, there is no coming back to God (ourselves) and we miss out on the special bliss of rediscovering our true nature.

So the inevitable Dark descends. The beautiful Snow White witch takes center stage, demanding her all-knowing mirror appear. She asks, "Slave in the magic mirror, come from the deepest space...through rain and fire I summon thee...speak! Let me see thy face!" The mirror tells her "...three lovelier maidens I see. And here, in Mickey's imagination, beauty and love will always survive." Remember, "imagination" is used to represent the True Reality, the soul-dimension where only God exists, with no illusory space, time, matter, or life. This dimension is pure love and total potential for beauty. "NO!" she shrieks. She casts a spell, which transforms her into the old crone witch. She is showing us the physical manifestation of what she really is, in her soul. Shriveled, ugly, but she has power. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, all the forces of evil I call," she cackles.

It is inevitable, as I said. The human drama is all about illusion. And that's what evil is. Believing that the illusion of physical things is real, and believing the illusion that we are each of us separate. We are not, of course. We are all pieces of one soul. We are all, in the dimension of true reality, just one big soul — which is God. We are God. But we are allowed this trip, this game, in this illusory physical world (like a game board), and we are temporarily blinded to believe we are separate, so that "evil" can exist. And we have "choice" so that we can either give in or resist evil. More on this soon.

The witch calls the evil into the world. We are first visited by Ursula; one of the famous Disney villains from The Little Mermaid. She says, "Mickey Mouse will be mine; I'll see him wriggle like a worm on a hook!" And, "You have the power to control his mind." This is so telling. Evil does just that. Controls our minds. Convinces us, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that reality is what we (think we) see. That we are all separate beings. That we must compete against each other.

We see Fantasia images again, of the Lord of the Dead; the evil Demon Lord (the Devil) who calls all the lesser demons and tortured souls forth; he drags the tortured dead screeching from their graves; they are re-animated and ride across the face of the earth. Chaos reigns. The Lord of Illusion is laying his traps. He is having his day. The interpretation of this is: People are beginning to believe in the illusions — that they are separate from each other, that they should FEAR; that they should take all they can for themselves to protect themselves; that others are their enemies... The Lord of Illusion reigns over a world of dead beings. A dead being is a person who has not seen that he is indeed God, and can live in the dimension of True Reality here on earth. No, a dead being is Bob Slocum, is the majority of people on the earth. People who don't see that the game is really all about serving others, having no fear for one's own welfare, for serving others is SERVING ONESELF! Dead people slouch around in misery on the earth's surface, believing they are somehow "cut off" instead of what is true: connected.

The Sleeping Beauty witch appears. "Now you will deal with me, and all the powers of MY imagination!" The line in the movie, though, which we all know, is "Now you will deal with me, and all the powers of HELL!" Yes, hell is now reigning on earth. For evil does have an imagination – a very vivid one. She reaches deep into hers and calls forth the Dragon. The Dragon represents the manifestation of the "illusion" traps laid by the Devil. So many people have bought into his illusions, have LIVED by them and have lived them, that manifested, very real, into our "reality" (which is, of course, not actually fully real) is an evil beast. The Dragon. The culmination and conglomeration of all that's evil.

It breathes fire and the whole rivers of America are set ablaze. Thus, the whole earth is scorched by the Dragon's breath. Evil destroys all life. The fire burns away all living things of beauty – nature is destroyed, burned down. Evil hates beauty. That is made very clear in *Fantasmic!* Mickey cowers before the Dragon.

But Mickey then turns, and says to the Dragon, "Ha! You may think you're so powerful, well uh, this is MY dream!" and he shoots lightning from his staff that kills the Dragon. Mickey has said, "...this is my dream..." That's the key to everything. All in one simple sentence. We are

God. We created this game of physical illusions, of the physical universe, this playing field. We created the potential for "evil" (to make the game fun). It was OUR dream, and since we made it, we can defeat it. Evil is just a manifestation of humans' wrong manner of thinking. We can dispel it easily by thinking in right manner. By seeing the Truth. By recognizing the dimension of True Reality. Once we do, evil has no power. Because it doesn't actually exist.

Mickey, on a more psychological level, also represents here every son who must at some point break away from his mother and claim the world (and a woman) for his own. The mother tries to keep the son under her confines, under the "safety" of her watchful eye; sheltered from the evil of the world. But the son must break these actually selfish clutches to claim his birthright as heir to the Kingdom; and when I say that, I mean LITERALLY every one of us (girl and boy) is a ruler of this world; a king of this kingdom, and that we must recognize (as Jesus has said) that we are really God and rule the ultimate Kingdom – heaven (not a Christian heaven specifically; heaven in the sense of the dimension of True Reality), and earth, and heaven on earth! When Mickey slays the dragon, he is not only the son breaking free from the mother, but he is the human being destroying the illusion of matter and separation (the feminine world) and graduating to the divinized human being – one who recognizes the illusion and lives outside and inside of the illusion! One who now loves the illusion as our own beautiful creation, as a manifestation of Godhead – thus worshipping the feminine in CONNECTION with God, not in separation from God. After all, what does Mickey say just before he defeats the dragon, when the dragon is in the height of its power and projecting as much fear as it is capable of producing upon Mickey and the world? (because its only real weapon is fear). Mickey says, "You may think you're so powerful, well, uh, this is MY dream!!" In fact, these words ARE his weapons. He is realizing, and stating, that WE have created this "game" of the physical realm ourselves, and WE (as God) created the opponent – the dragon! We created our opponent, which is ego and fear, so that we can have the joy of defeating it and coming to know God (ourselves) once again like it was new! Also, so we feel we EARNED it. So these words defeat the dragon simply because Mickey refuses to recognize its illusion as reality. This world is, after all, a dream OF OUR OWN MAKING, and we can choose it HOWEVER WE WANT! These words are literal, not some inspirational cliché. I am speaking literally. This is what Mickey demonstrates to us. So, there is a celebration, then Mickey gives us an example of what the Divinized Life is – the

potential – the power that one has in that divine state – he creates starbursts and universes with a thought, a wave of the hand, like God. But as a child in attitude – no ego there. Just play. True God. But let's backtrack.

After the dragon is slain, and the female villains fall (the world of matter is dissolved in our minds), what comes next is Tinkerbell, the nature sprite (who is actually real), the fairie, who comes to restore the devastated nature (devastated by man during the era in which they subscribed to the illusion of matter) – she's the feminine nature spirit, the Creator, and she does the work of bringing life back to the planet. After her, the riverboat appears on the horizon, with spiraling circles of sparks and fire emanating from its side. It's beautiful – it's like the ship of the Lord coming to claim its children, finally, after so many eons of struggle and suffering. On a basic level, it could be seen as the ship that transports our soul to the beautiful, strife-free afterlife after the death of our bodies. But on a deeper level, it is the end of the whole, eons-long cycle of human drama; when we have all evolved our soul's life and bodies' life into the enlightened human being – perhaps no longer a human being, but the next evolutionary step...

Then, lights illumine the ship and we see it's filled with all the Disney characters and steered by Mickey himself. The Disney characters are all the saints in the heavens – they all represent something, they all come with a STORY that we are familiar with, we have already invested in each of them many emotions and personal associations, because of the movies that they are in. So just by gazing at each of these characters, we are filled in that moment with all the emotional results of the work of dozens and dozens of movies!!! So in one moment, we feel like we do while watching many great movies COMBINED! It's really a brilliant concept, actually. And these characters who we already love and associate with tales smile at us with unconditional love and wave at us; we are all invited and join the celebration of the new Divine life with them. There are a lot of powerful emotions mixing and swirling within us now, it's quite an intense play with our feelings. Then, the music (which sounds very celebratory) begins to recap what has just come, with the lyrics "...and out of the night dark forces ignite to blind you with frightening scenes; you use your might to fight in the night..." After the dark era is over, the struggles become merely stories that are told; myths of the past, told by the people and the elders to the youth - they become the culture's wisdom. That is what is happening here! What was just

recently a very real and scary struggle is now, with relief and smiles and celebratory joy, a story that we can tell of our triumph; it's our spiritual HISTORY now. And even deeper than that: We ourselves are all of the characters and we have lived all of their dramas! Because we are all one soul, so no matter which story, WE lived it! We lived through many past lives and lived many of the stories even as our own little soul-piece! And so WE CONTROLLED our destiny. We fashioned this beautiful and lovely game! We sculpted it out of our choices! We were all just artists, creating something exciting and beautiful! That's all! We made it all; all the dramas and tales and wars and diseases and devastations and triumphs were our art piece, and that's all it was. What a delicious relief now to see that, to be on the other side of the darkness and to finally, finally be in the dimension of TRUE REALITY. But we are seeing and living and being in this true reality STILL IN THE BODY! Still here on earth!

The feeling of hearing our drama re-capped (dark forces ignite, you use your might to fight...) in the context of the Big Celebration is...well, it's just indescribable. All I can say is it's a sweet feeling of joy, of recognition that–not just that things were tough and now they're okay, it's more like– things were terribly tough, and now we have just learned, stunningly and shockingly, that they were all just a game! So we now can look back at the game and see it for what it is, and LOVE it in a way that we never could have loved it before. We have entered a heaven; we are with the angels and saints (all the characters on the boat) in heaven, recognizing how splendidly we have performed in this GAME that WE OURSELVES helped create way back at the beginning, when we were all one soul with God!!! So we love the game we created because it gave us the ability to uncover our own divinity and experience it 1) as if it were new and 2) as if we EARNED it ourselves. This is, in Kabbalah, called "removing the Bread of Shame." So, now, we all celebrate with the saints and angels and gods and goddesses on the boat, (and they themselves are now free of their own strife and struggle, which we have experienced with them during their movies– it's almost like, we are now in a realm where everything, finally, is okay), and then the boat sails off in the distance, and the light illumining it goes off. We are in dark for a brief moment.

Then Mickey appears, on top of the house on Tom Sawyer island, and in his most irreverent, happy, child-like way (not compassionate love like the saints on the boat, no, Mickey is simpler

than that– he's just the child, that's all) he shows us what the fully Divinized human being's capabilities are– that is, to be as God on earth, to create starbursts with just a thought, a wave of the hand. He now actually does what in the beginning he could only do in his dreams, with the Sorcerer's hat on, not really aware of how or what he was doing. In the beginning he was the child, but now he has been through ORDEAL, and has gained WISDOM, and has passed through the darkness within himself and has emerged an adult, a divinized human being. Thus, a REAL flesh-and-blood Mickey Mouse appears, not a projected animated image, and REAL starbursts (in the form of fireworks) explode, thus the true potential has been earned and achieved and realized in this three-dimensional universe…and it never had been before. It is the human task to create this; God has given this task to us; God has left it up to us. Mickey actually bids the stars to swirl around him, and in a burst of fireworks, they obey. He creates beautiful colors, stars, galaxies, universes – all with the wave of a hand. THIS is our potential: Manifesting into reality our mental imagery, our thoughts. We claim our birthright in that moment; we reclaim the God that we are, and we BE the God. *Fantasmic!* does not take us all the way to our unity with Godhead after we dissolve our physical bodies, it ends with us STILL IN THE BODY, on earth, living the Divine HUMAN life. This is, really, the extent our consciousness can conceive; the Godhead realm is inconceivable. But being Gods on earth is very much within our grasp, and that's what *Fantasmic!* points out. And if any skeptic doubts this, all he has to do is look around for the proof----he sits in the middle of Disneyland! Disney himself and what he has accomplished is living proof of a small piece of the potential of man on earth. And he is living proof that that potential is limitless and immortal (it lives on after his death, does it not?). Anyone can do what he did, and beyond. And lastly, as we have been taken through the whole cosmic drama of the soul, from the beginning, through its tasks, and shown the final goal and potential, we bid good-bye and thank you, for now, to the technology fashioned by MAN'S HANDS that brought us the experience – the lighting towers, as they descend back into the earth!

Little snacks are arranged before me in stages by the flight attendant; first a glass of cranberry juice, then a little plastic container of creamy, spreadable jack cheese along with a little strawberries and creme hard candy in its own pink and white wrapper, followed by a golden

bag of Harvest Gourmet yellow corn chips. The stuff is all laid out before me and I am grateful for the nourishment and the attention to my needs as I always am when on an airplane. I have just eaten a cheese sandwich that I brought on board, but I will eat this too. I am going home to Portland and to William.

Bridget wants to offer William and me a gift of a night at Breitenbush Hot Springs. She hears the strain still in my voice when we talk on the phone, and has heard my tales of the production whirlwind, and wants to do this for us simply because she loves us and can't help helping. We discuss it. I try to convince her out of it. She wins.

"I want to pay for a night at Breitenbush for you and William. You need to soak. You need to rest."

"No, I don't want you to pay for it. Why should you?"

"Because you're my best friend in the whole world and I love you and I want to help your health."

"You're very sweet, but you should spend your money to help your own health. I want you to be healthy too, and to have your Lothlorien." Her "Lothlorien" is a little, magical place of her own with a studio and a small, sunny yard.

"A hundred dollars won't make a difference towards that but it will for you and William right now."

"But I chose this hardship. I've been given my writing back through it. That's such a gift."

"That is a huge gift. But that doesn't mean you should turn down your best friend's love."

"You're a very sweet and stubborn brat."

I'll just do something for her at a time when it will be most helpful. I told Bridget that she'd have to repeat the process all over again to convince William.

The strawberries and creme candy melts in my mouth and washes a fullness over me as I write this. I'm being reborn or something, pumped with life and spirit fulfillment. I write with the Space Pen that Bridget gave me; it can write upside down or on a wet surface. The pink tourmaline ring that William put on my ring finger glows a vibrant rubellite in the sun shining through the window of the plane. Mountain ranges with snow and tree-topped peaks stretch below in clusters, tufts of botyroidal clouds drift by lazily. I want to be in every one of the mini-

scenes my eye lands on. It's all inviting; something in me jumps to the spot, then to another, again, and again. I can't take it all in, I want to project my consciousness out and be there and everywhere. It's the world, after all, our home, and it looks so honest outside of the high-rise building and tarmac crust we corrupt it with, its honest face scarred with scabs it doesn't deserve.

We land. I wait for the people in front to exit the plane. I don't want to be pushy and in a hurry like so many around me. Still, as I get closer to the security area, I begin to walk faster. Then, I am in William's arms; our arms have been clutched tight around each other for at least two minutes, which is a long time when you're at an airport and people are filing by on either side of you like traffic moving in opposite lanes.

"Welcome home, my little honey," William whispered tenderly.

"Thank you, love," I answered, contentedly. We hugged some more.

"We both need each others' closeness."

I nod into his chest. "I'm very lucky to have yours."

Arm in arm, we walk to the baggage claim area. We remove my baggage from the carousel and go home together, aware that we'll wake up tomorrow and share our dreams.

Part 2

Chapter 9

A Purple Heart

"I need to slide in there. You don't even have to get up. You're little like me."
I slide in easily past the girl sitting in the aisle seat on the plane. "I like the window seat because I can just sit cross-legged and lean up against the window and go to sleep."

She's petite with a neck-length hairstyle, all one length, in a gray t-shirt, jeans and sandals. She's young and has a friendly disposition and a bright smile.

"Do these seats go back?" she asks me. I believed that they did and hunted around for the little button and did not find one. "My neck gets cramped if I can't lean back."

"Mine too," I amiably agree, smiling the smile of the shared experience of being short. "What's your name?"

"Odessa."

"Maria. Nice to meet you."

"Are you from Portland?"

"Well, I'm originally from Syracuse, New York. I've lived in San Francisco, Vegas, Los Angeles and now I live in Portland. Where are you from?"

"Bakersfield."

"Oh, I know where that is. It's hot there."

"Yes, the air quality is bad. That's why I'm moving to Portland."

"Really? Do you have friends here, or are you moving for a job?"

"I work at Trader Joe's and I'm transferring. I'm finishing school."

"Which Trader Joe's ... do you know yet? I'm wondering if it's the one I go to."

"It's on 39th."

"39th and Holgate?"

"Um ... it's in the southeast. It's next to something called..."

"Limbo's?"

"Yes."

"That's the one I go to! I'll see you!"

We settle into our seats. I am happy. I am flying to Los Angeles to shoot the second half of *Life on Mars*. It's Sunday, June 4, 2006.

The plane takes off and I see the trees and cars get smaller and smaller. Before you know it, we're up high enough where it's sunny now. I think of William and how I'll see him tomorrow and how we waved to each other a very long time and blew kisses after I went through security at the gate. The voice over the plane loudspeaker said that it is 90 degrees in Burbank. I think of having to be dressed up in an alien suit in the desert with some trepidation.

I was given my sweet, snacky food in little packages, dried Sunsweet prunes and a slice of banana bread and a glass of water without ice. I ate the rest of my sandwich, half of which I ate at the airport waiting with William, along with the prunes and saved the banana bread. I am reading *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway.

The mountains out the window are surreal. White-capped at the top and along high elevation valleys and ridges, the snow creates such a rich texture that the mountains are blinding. I can vaguely see that trees poke out everywhere from the white layering, and the low elevation valleys have rivers running through them. A very circular lake lies beyond them with a couple islands in it, Crater Lake, perhaps? Some of the mountains are sheer rock faces, I can tell by their smoothness and total lack of vegetation.

Now there are many squares below me of various earth tones, small areas of cultivated land interspersed with sections overrun with little clusters of houses. They seep towards the mountains and are stopped by them. Most of this is farmland; solid green/brown/gray squares and rectangles perfectly fitted together.

In the center of the farmlands that are emerging is a small, low mountainous area with winding, sandy trails all over it that are shaped like worms. They're pretty and they make me want to be on them. Everything looks so amazing from above, so pure and clean and inviting.

Now come more big mountains with a surprising lack of snow. The hilly swells bulge, brown and smoothly ridged, higher and higher until they erupt into mountains with trees everywhere. The pilot announces our descent, no snow in sight, anywhere at any height.

Here it comes, oceans of stucco-like houses break like waves upon winding roads and cul-de-sacs. Then, up the valleys of the browning hills, up and beyond, an endless sprawl of man-made condos, industrial-looking boxes, dull, gray and large, stretching for miles, as far as the eye can see, and farther, I'm sure. I think, *two hundred years ago this was not here*. Even two lifetimes ago, when my grandparents were born, we hadn't done this to ourselves and to the earth. I think, *wow. I live in a tiny window of time when life is so unnatural. It's a short aberration, time stretched before this era with none of these pollutions. Weird. There are other ways to live upon this land and they feel so needed all of a sudden.*

As I walk down the ramp coming off the plane the wind blows hot and steady, the sun is bright and I'm here again. I grab my big, red suitcase off the baggage carousel, call Paul and go outside to wait by the curb. This time I'm standing in the shade. People bustle all around me. Cyndi Lauper's *Girls Just Want to Have Fun* plays softly over the loudspeaker. I stand there casually, feeling a little like a soldier in transit.

Paul's red Honda Civic turns the corner and pulls over, and I start to walk towards it. Out Paul comes with a big hello and hug and loads me in and bustles me off. Two minutes later he's on his cell phone.

I told him I felt like a soldier. "I guess that makes me the general," he replied with satisfaction, darting in and out of traffic.

"But I've moved up in rank and earned a Purple Heart."

"Hello, Jeff Beard...?"

Paul is talking to Jeff about Michel's level of dedication to the project. He can't be always auditioning. He needs to be proactively busy during production. He's needed full time from this point on.

When Paul is off the phone, he turns to me. "Do you have any white t-shirts because the bugs seem to stay away from white."

"Bugs? What bugs?"

"Oh my God, there are swarms of little tiny bugs at Sable Ranch, where we're shooting the community in the woods scenes. When Doug and I were scouting there, we discovered that they're everywhere and when you move, as soon as you stand still, they start swarming around you again."

So bugs are one of the challenges of this half of the shoot. Okay, so be it.

Paul and I have arrived at Trader Joe's and are shopping for vegetarian food that's quick and easy. Paul was just on the phone with Alec Nemser about who the aliens were going to be and began calling around to lock them in. I am to be one of the aliens. I'm really excited about this. It's not every day you get to be an alien. Or make a movie, for that matter. Paul and Doug are still working on the shooting schedule.

I called William and told him about the bugs. As a former hiker and mountain climber extraordinaire, he didn't miss a beat.

"You need to take Vitamin B1. Get everybody to take Vitamin B1. It even keeps the deer flies away because they can smell it on your skin."

Paul was talking about Doug breaking into the film industry.

"If you want to break into the film industry, you just volunteer to work on a set in any capacity possible. Then, once you're on, you go to the department you're interested in; if it's camera you go to the DP, if it's lighting you go to the gaffer, if it's editing you go to the editor, if it's directing it's a little harder, but I'm in the position now that I'm always glad to share with people who come to me. You don't need a degree or experience or anything. You go up to the DP if it's camera and say you're interested in camera and could you stand by and quietly watch. Doug did this and by the end of the shoot he was loading the film.

"When you come on set, if you're responsible and efficient, you'll get noticed. He saw that the grip truck was a total mess, half eaten pizza slices and boxes and cans everywhere. He rummaged around and found trash bags, he didn't ask anyone, he just did it, and cleaned it all up and for days, the grips had that as the main talk, 'Who cleaned up the grip truck?' and then Doug finally said, 'I did it,' and they were like, 'Wow, we've been meaning to do that for days."

I thought, *wow, how clever. How proactive and innovative. It worked. He got himself noticed in the most psychologically effective way possible, by performing a key act and letting the act speak for him, letting time go by so the suspense can build, instead of trying to speak for himself, which I'm sure they've all seen too much of before, and it's true, actions speak louder than words.*

We met up with Doug for dinner and a session of shot listing at Mel's Diner.

"Maybe we can sneak a scene in here," Paul ponders.

"It's not sneaking, let's add it." Doug starts writing.

"What do we call it?"

"Maybe it's not appropriate to call it scene 70A."

"Let's ask the script supervisor," Paul suggests.

"I've seen it happen before, not very often, but a couple times." Doug turns to me, "Is William right handed or left handed?"

"Right handed."

"Then we should shoot over his left shoulder. The tent needs to be set up to accommodate that shot…Oh my God, I wrote 'leaves blowing on deck.' I meant to write 'papers blowing on desk.' Where did that come from?" Doug is amused at himself and gets out his eraser.

He's a boat guy. He's got sailing on the brain.

"There were a thousand flies around while we were discussing this scene and he was writing that," Paul said to me. He then addresses Doug, "I was talking about leaves while you were writing too."

"Yes, but ... on deck?"

The extra scene is to be a shot over William's shoulder of him drawing alchemical symbols while surrounded by photocopies of Martian landscape, crystals and coils.

There are going to be artificial logs lit by a propane ring buried in the fire pit. This is in lieu of a real bonfire in the community in the woods. It's very expensive to get permits to build a real fire, and unnecessary. Besides, real fires don't work very well because a director can't say cut and have the fire go out instantly. Nor can he say, "Could we have a little more flame, a bit more, there, that's it." Guerrilla filmmaking isn't an option on land owned by Paramount Studios. All of the possible guerrilla locations for these scenes fell through. But, ultimately, the

rest of the money came through, due to the trailer from the footage of the first half that Paul and Steve cut together to wow potential investors. It came through in big chunks, and quickly. It's only about two and a half months since we finished the first half of the shoot.

"In scene 59, we're wondering why Tatiana is waiting for June to come back. You have to give them something to do or it will end up on the editing room floor."

"71, 62, 80, 70A...no, wait. In First 71 and 62, then Jennifer dies...70, 70A, 88M. Now we can do 59, now it can be dark out. Continuity wise it makes sense to do 55 and then 59. 55 is a night exterior and the crew will be setting it up while it's still light out, then we can move into a smaller shot. Does that make sense continuity wise?"

That's the shooting order for day 3. 59 then 55.

We left the diner and paid the $8 totally overpriced parking for 1 1/2 hours. We drove away and passed a Marilyn Monroe and an Elvis impersonator looking pretty bleak and unexcited.

"I wonder if that's the same Marilyn Monroe impersonator I saw in a documentary who was living in this hotel with other impersonators and they were all wannabes and she got pregnant in the middle of this gig and the guy left her or something and she was like, 'I think I'll just have the baby. Other people do it, I can do it.'"

That's crazy. What possesses people to make such absolutely unsound decisions like that in such blatantly obvious circumstances to the contrary?

As we're parking, Paul says that his car got broken into again a couple nights ago. He has to park on the street, sometimes several blocks from his apartment. Sometimes he's lucky to find a space at all, even an unsafe one.

Back at his apartment, he showed me Bougereaux and Sally Mann photos. I did a load of laundry for Paul and Doug. They had poison oak infected clothing to put in the wash, sneakers included. I am going to sleep on Paul's fold out couch. Doug has an air mattress blown up beside me. Doug will be up working until 2 am.

Paul and Doug were off doing a camera test at 9 am. I stayed behind and did another load of bug spray and poison oak soaked laundry.

Sitting here on Paul's couch, alone, it strikes me that there are so many things around me to explore. I could go over and touch Paul's palm tree, for example. Or examine his signed

picture of Marlene Dietrich that Eryk Hanut, Andrew Harvey's husband, gave him. Or I could go to the refrigerator and open it and see all the food waiting there to nourish me that I picked out and took home myself. Is this engaged, grateful awareness a result of my illness? Is it a result of my just sitting quietly? Would it have come anyway if I hadn't gotten so ill, just by sensing my mortality?

My mind's eye flared with an image flashback. The image brought me back to May 13th when I had fallen asleep, following a heartfelt conversation with William about the film and my health that lasted a good part of the night. When I finally lay down to sleep my heart was beating very erratically, pounding heavily and palpitating every ten or fifteen seconds. My chest felt heavy and tight, and twinged regularly with pulling pains amidst the palpitations.

As I began to drift off, I saw screws falling from the ceiling or sky in my mind's eye, tip down, the sky coming apart, me below dodging and trying not to get hit. Then I was up and outside of the earth's atmosphere somewhere looking down onto this convex lake of a smooth, possibly viscous material, curved outward like the lens of an eye but of a dark blue iridescence, like the surface of a black pearl only deep blue underneath. Along the edges of this lake-like surface were fleshy ridges, like the small pad of flesh in the corner of your eye, or like the photos you see in anatomy texts of the inside of the uterus. These were formed in step-like ridges going deep into the blue iridescent convex lake.

I hung above this. It was huge, I was positioned face down, seeing from two perspectives at once; one looking straight down on it from a suspended position, the other being a side view of my face looking down while never not being able to see the eye-lake. I hung there, suspended, filled with the most clarity-drenched sensation of tenuousness I have ever felt, like in the scene from *Jurassic Park* where the woman fell onto a large windshield of a vehicle suspended over the edge of a cliff, and the spidery cracks she had made kept lengthening underneath her as she lay there, splayed on the glass, looking into the abyss. This sensation was far more tenuous than what I felt even when skydiving, looking down at a 10,000 foot drop with my legs hanging out of the hatch of the little Cessna airplane. Why? The answer was so simple now. I was a robust thing, hardy and healthy, jumping out of an airplane to inflict danger from *outside* myself, to try and get a deeper sense of my own character, while this experience was coming from *inside my very own body*, the thing that was humming as if with electric current of too much voltage, pulsing with little jolts at the force of my very own heartbeat as the fluttery

beat beat beat continued, too rapid and too shallow. I sensed that if I just jiggled a little and broke the suspension, profundity and awe, I would plummet down immediately into the lake and a fall from that extreme height would take less than a second. I knew this and I held there utterly still, suspended, tenuous and indefinite. I chose that. I chose to stay.

I woke up.

When I told William this dream he said, with love and concern, "Don't you go get reborn now."

"What do you mean?"

"It sounds like you were about to re-enter another uterus."

I had told him that there was an element of impending death in the feeling of the dream, but I said it in a still figuring it out, vague, about to begin a revelation sort of way, with innocence before knowledge hits. Knowledge never did hit, though. It kind of crept, with a you-still-will-never-really-know feeling, but also with a reality that wasn't there before. Life changes seem right around the corner, changes in my job and lifestyle under my command if I choose, possible tenuous consequences seeming far less frightening. I notice my eyes work, my hands work, my emotions feel. There are clothes on my body that keep me warm. Other human beings instinctively treat me as one of them, they look at me and speak to me and offer me food and give me cues that show me that my bodily experience is the same as theirs without conscious thought. This is what it means to be human. This is what it means to be alive. I feel joy and relief and look down at my body, feeling that this is me, a human being alive right now. And, miraculously, this life is enough.

William arrived, and we were off to Erewhon. Randy was working, and we gave him a clear quartz crystal, which he received reverently with cupped hands like he was handed a child or something small and precious and living. He said he didn't deserve something so amazing and beautiful but of course he did, he proved it by the way he received it. William may be able to sell Erewhon twelve of his Mμ-Ankhs to be sold out of their tonic bar. Randy was glad to see us again. The bar obviously was busier. Eventually, the customers finally cleared out after Sara came to help and we had a long talk with Randy about crystals and helped him identify the ones he had in his medicine pouch that had been gifted to him as well. William also befriended a guy

named Dean who was selling packaged urban tonics you can brew at home. We left with a really good feeling and with good food bought with money Bridget gave us to get a healthy start.

At Paul's apartment, Doug and Paul are still wrapping up the scheduling and refining the shots. We're looking at clips to test the camera filters for certain scenes. There are clips with the new AC holding up clapboards with cool and warm and normal filters for each scene and Paul and Doug are choosing which ones they want.

For lunch, we all went to Eat-a-Pita, a little middle-eastern place that's not much more than a food stand, but it's in a permanent building with an elaborate back patio, which is where you eat. There is no inside seating. You sit among little fountains and draping vines around wrought iron tables and eat good, healthy portions for six or seven dollars. Near the end of the meal, I interviewed Paul, Doug and William about the inspirations for *Life on Mars* and the experience of working with each other.

When we got back to Paul's place, Jeff and Greg were there to pick up Doug. We greeted each other. Jeff said he had had surgery because he had been having a lot of acid reflux. He showed us his four small scars and said he can't lift over fifteen pounds for a couple months. I told him I had had pneumonia.

"We were both wounded in battle. Now we're decorated."

Jeff smiled. "It's a pleasure to have you back."

The sign outside the door said Suite 117. I checked in at the desk, then waited about five minutes and was called back, given forms to fill out and ushered next door. The date is Friday, April 21, 2006. I am at a hospital, getting tests done on my lungs to get healthy before I participate in the second half of the shoot in June.

One form is titled, "Consent for Radiologic Contrast Material Administration." There's a list, a long one, to determine whether I am at risk for being allergic to the dye. I'm here for a CAT scan because they saw a nodular spot on my x-ray behind a small, dark blotch that marked fluid in my right lung. The x-ray was taken a couple weeks before and since then, my cough has gone almost totally away and I feel much better. Before I went to the doctor and got the x-ray, I wasn't able to sleep, resting back on four pillows, half sitting up to be able to breathe. I had not stopped coughing for five days and nights. William was my impeccable caretaker, bringing me miso soup and warm liquids in bed, holding me close when I felt horrible, consulting Medline for

information…and affecting an amazing turn of events in the pulmonary specialist's office, wizard that he is, having worked in a pulmonary research lab at Harvard in the late '60's.

I remember looking up at him as he sat on the side of the bed with his arm around me. "It's weird, but I realize now how much work I've done in my life, inner work, I mean. In a weird way, I feel like I've done enough, in the outside world too, I have *been* enough, both as roles in society and as the integrity of my own character. I can just lie here and be, well, kind of at peace. I didn't know I would feel that." *Cough cough…*

The next form is a CT/MRI Patient History Questionnaire. "In your own words, why has your doctor ordered this exam? Please describe any symptoms you're having, (including the location.)" I wrote: "The chest x-ray shows that there is a spot in my mid right lung that she would like to examine better. I occasionally feel a slight tugging or ache, very brief bursts, like a sore muscle, which don't coincide with my breathing or coughing."

There's a third form for the radiologist. I complete my sections and walk back up to the window and hand the clipboard back to the young, olive-skinned receptionist. The waiting room looks a little like a hotel lobby, as doctor's offices tend to do. The walls are mauve and the chairs are teal green with wood frames and arm rests. People sit reading magazines or books.

A radiologist eventually calls my name and ushers me into a little room with a sliding wood panel for a door that folds as you slide it open. She is friendly and smiling and instructs me to take off my shirt and put on a hospital gown. I ask for a blanket because nobody anywhere ever keeps their office warm enough. She then leads me to a room that has a huge, white, flat donut in the center. This donut is the CAT scan machine. I have to lie on a table with a thin white mattress on it covered by a sheet with my feet pointing toward the donut and my jeans unzipped because the CAT scan may reach down to my upper abdomen. The table is slightly slanted at the top to prop up my head and upper back.

The radiologist takes my arm and injects a needle into it, connecting it to a spirally clear IV tube. I don't watch this process. She ties a big rubber band around my upper arm and gives me a squishy blue foam ball to grip. She tells me the IV will flow and then the dye will come in the middle and make me feel warm, even in my bladder, and there may be a metallic taste in my mouth.

I put both my arms up over my head and the machine starts whirring. The whole table moves with me on it until my whole torso is right in the center of the donut. I can see the x-ray

cameras whirring around through a window lining the whole inside of the donut hole. A man's voice says, "Breathe in ... hold your breath ... breathe." This happens twice without a long pause after "hold your breath," then there is a short period of silence. The dye starts flowing and I feel the warm sensations, then the table moves so my chest is in the donut again and the voice tells me to hold my breath, this time for a long time, maybe 30 seconds. I feel a little bit high. Then it is over, I'm out of the donut and she's detaching the IV from my arm and putting a cotton ball on the pricked spot with a rubbery bandage wrapped around and around near my elbow. Then I'm free to change and go.

Several days pass by and then I see a pulmonary specialist on May 2. William sits by me in the little examination room. An intern comes in and asks me a million questions about illnesses and conditions, to which I, luckily, consistently answer no. I tell him the conditions under how I got sick. Then the pulmonary specialist enters and tells me that I have swollen lymph nodes in my right lung. He said I should have five more CAT scans during the next two years to make sure that cancer or lymphoma or something else doesn't develop, and to make sure that the swelling goes away.

"Wait a minute," William interjects, after remaining silent for some time. "Has she had a blood test?"

"Yes," the specialist answers, "but we have to–"

"No," the intern interrupts, "She hasn't had a blood test. Look."

"Oh. Then we need to get you a blood test," the specialist says, without looking. "You can have it done today in the adjacent building. But it's up to you to follow up on getting those additional CAT scans. We'll send you a notice as six months draws near."

"Thank you," I said, and took my little blood test slip and went to the next building and got a blood test, and the results came back completely negative. That means my body is not likely to be fighting cancer or even a cold. I will pass on the 460 more x-rays that I would have received if I had the five follow up CAT scans. I thanked William for saving my financial life, which is true even though I have insurance. William cautions, "I'm not encouraging you not to get the additional CAT scans, I'm just recommending you do your homework and make the doctors work for their money. They've become very bad at following even their own protocols. Considering all your symptoms, a blood test should have been performed immediately."

I do know that my immune system is chronically exhausted and that I need long-term rest, or at least a week, for God's sake, something I haven't had to myself in over four years. It turns out I won't get that rest until August, but I've escaped becoming a ward of the medical system. My life, once again, can turn to Mars.

Chapter 10

This Way to Mars

William and I are back in L.A. getting ready to shoot the second part of the film. Last night when I went to sleep I was buzzing with expectation. I awoke from an intense dream. It's 5:30am in the morning, Tuesday, June 6th. William's awake. We're sleeping in Paul's bed so William can get proper rest before he has to act later this week. He can tell I've had a dream and says, with sweet, attentive eyes, "Tell me about it."

"In the dream a storm was coming and I was walking with papers. They blew out of my hand and I chased them for six blocks and when I retrieved them from a lawn I saw that they were real estate papers. They were covered with numbers related to the sale of a house we were buying together. There were other papers strewn about so I wasn't sure if I was the only one who had papers fly away. After running back six blocks, I was out of breath and got into my car and ended up in a line of slow moving traffic. I picked you up, and with you driving we left the traffic-congested area. As we drove farther out from the city, it became dark and there was lightning. A bolt of lightning struck about a hundred feet ahead and illuminated a street in a small town. In the sky was a swirling hurricane storm. You turned off the headlights and backed the car down the street. A little way down the hill we found this hotel that consisted of a series of log cabins. The woman that came out to help us was very humble and friendly. I noticed her small diamond wedding ring. I got the sense that her husband wasn't there.

"We were given food and drink. The place had some of the nestled-in-the-woods ambience of Breitenbush Hot Springs, where we go to soak and relax and eat communal organic vegetarian meals. You ordered me a drink in a small white bowl with a lid. You took off the lid

and poured some of the clear liquid, maybe sake, into an even smaller white cup and sipped it. We felt taken in and safely in hiding for the time being."

"Amazing!"

Having shared the dream with William, I fell contentedly back to sleep.

By the time I awoke again, William was already out buying art supplies for his tent. Paul had just gotten up and sometimes both his phones were ringing at once.

William came back and built a scriptorium out of a wooden drawing board, basal wood slats and some flat decorative book binding tape. He did it all on Paul's kitchen table with nothing more than an Exacto knife. It was amazing to watch, you felt like he made these things for a living. He says he has a beautiful one he made 15 years ago when he owned a cabinet shop. He's always been into calligraphy and he took measurements from one he saw being used at a Trappist monastery he once stayed at in Oregon. A scriptorium is a slanted tabletop easel used in medieval times to copy illuminated texts.

Paul showed me scenes from *Cabaret, Juliet of the Spirits* and *Walkabout* that were inspiring to him for this film. In *Cabaret*, there were scenes of people posing in what were truly odd positions, but while you watched them they seemed believable. People were looking at a dead body in the street, posing at a dinner table, which looked like a painting, and there was a dance scene in which the dancing girls in the background were moving normally while the girl in the foreground was moving at half speed. In *Juliet of the Spirits* there were a lot of creative lighting shots. There were close-ups of actors' faces that were so dark that they were silhouettes. Artificial trees made the background or foreground stand out with a believable enchantedness. In *Walkabout*, at the end, the teenage girl has flashbacks of her adventure being stranded in the Australian outback with her younger brother, and there's a shot of their discarded clothing as shells, symbolizing culture, socialization, their old personas.

Afterwards, the three of us went to the LACMA museum to see Gauguin, Picasso, Matisse, Cézanne, Rodin and Monet. It was amazing and William left so filled and overloaded with art he said he felt disoriented. He said, "I never really got Cézanne, until today! Yes, I understood his contribution, but his Sous Bois (Under the Trees) blew me completely away. I only went there to see the Gauguin, but then boom! It was like looking at an animation of thousands of images, at once."

We spent the last part of the day watching David Lynch's *Fire Walk With Me* while eating raviolis and salsa (sorry for the blasphemy, Mom). We went to bed with our alarms set for 5:20 am.

Next thing we knew, we found ourselves in a small, very nice southern California backyard on Vista Street. We're on location for the first day of the second half of the shoot. William is at home preparing some surroundings for his tent. The character he plays, IAN, will be shot in three days: tomorrow, Friday and Saturday.

The crew is setting up for the first scene. Many faces I recognize; some are new. I introduce myself to the new ones and warmly greet the familiar ones.

Small round tables and folding chairs are going up all over the place. There's sawing at 6:30 in the morning somewhere in the distance. I start blowing up helium balloons and attaching bolts to the strings so that they won't blow away.

The tables are wrapped in cheap yellow party plastic and rimmed with fake luau grass. Neon frosted cupcakes and cellophane bags of cheap candy are placed on the tables. Doug asks me to stand in and I sit at one of the tables, posing as if bored. We go through several rehearsals with dancers in the background in costume and a lot of costumed partygoers crossing back and forth in front of the camera. Samantha and Marina rehearse several times. Paul takes the time he always does with the lighting and details. He positions Trevor's hand carefully on Samantha's shoulder during the French kiss scene.

It's amazing what a finely orchestrated thing this is. *Purple Haze* is the staged song for the dancers. Every action of the extra partygoers is worked out, how they walk, when they enter and exit. They have Marina eating more gross stuff, this time it's blue frosting off a cupcake. Paul and Doug didn't want to start actually shooting until 9 or 9:30, but nobody else knows that. The light will be better then. Crew call was 8 am with everyone arriving at 7 am. Paul and I, along with the art and lighting departments, arrived at 6.

There's a big white screen by the table where the actors sit because it's foggy and gray, and the atmosphere needs to be lightened. Kathy Christopherson, an old friend of Paul's, shows up in a white and red-checkered country girl outfit. She tells me she just got back from Italy a few days ago and is really jet lagged and that was why she was late.

Paul is intent and busy. He ate part of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and then forgot about it and I threw the remainder away.

They do the French kissing scene over and over. Trevor's hand gets stuck in his green Martian outfit, which is actually a green graduation gown with a plastic green rubber alien mask. They have Alec, who is dressed as a devil, enter first from one side, then the other. The iced blended coffee that Stefan drinks in this scene has become flat so they have to whip up some more. It's really chocolate milk with ice.

I was in the garage looking out the window so as not to be in the shot and saw script notes and a computer and CD's and a pile of scripts. Paul says that is where Peter Speakman and Mike Galvin write. They are friends of Paul's from *Freak Talks About Sex*; Mike Galvin is actually the writer of the book that was adapted into the screenplay.

Paul rapidly rubs his hands together before they roll, like he is about to roll dice. "Good energy," he says. He remains friendly, attentive, engaged.

He asks me to run back to his apartment, which is not far, and get his guitar, lantern and Sally Mann book. I cannot find the book and assume William has it since I told him to take it with him. As I leave Paul's apartment, I pass a guy with a camera getting into a car across the street. *It is everywhere,* I thought.

Back on location, I give the lantern and guitar to Teo, who takes the flower sticker off the case with Goo Gone, as Paul instructed. The art department is making rocks out of foam and spray-painting them for the scene where a bunch of young boys stone a swan to death by a lake. Trevor's makeup is being redone in the makeup area, which is the driveway in front of the house.

Shawn, the new first AD, seems to be really on top of it. He has a markedly sharp and efficient air.

The dolly cart and tracks have been set up by the table and positioned to film Trevor as he walks up to Samantha.

"Paul, your cue is 'dolly,'" says Shawn.

"Did you just tell me my cue was 'dolly?'"

"Yes, sir." Shawn spins briskly and announces, "Settle! Quiet! On your action, Paul!"

There is a brief pause, then, "Action, Trevor! ...and cut! That balloon is right in his face!"

People bustle out and move the balloons.

"Are you looking through the mouth, Trevor?" Paul is trying to get him to walk smoothly to the table, looking directly ahead, but he cannot see well through his mask.

"I'm looking through here," Trevor points at his eyeholes.

"Okay, after a couple of lookdowns, look straight up."

Trevor walks into the scene looking sideways. Then he fumbles with the chair he drags over to Samantha, then he pulls off his mask awkwardly. They redo the scene several times until the mask cooperates.

When we break for lunch we have pasta, salad with vegetarian Caesar dressing and a veggie medley. It is good and I find out that Michel made it. Michel is now delegated to catering and catering alone. Mr. Juicy Nectar is history. Michel is doing a good job by himself, even without experience cooking for billionaires.

After lunch, Shawn bustles around, moving things along between departments. Shawn is much more engaged and outspoken than Seth was. He has more experience, and so does Marc, the new second AD.

Marc says he's glad things are going more smoothly than the first half. *He's heard some pretty wild stories about the first half, I'm sure.* Marc has worked on feature films in the one million to five million dollar range and says that even though the budget is low on this film, the talent is high. He says that he and Shawn talked a lot before the shoot so he knew what was expected of him. Shawn constantly relays a lot of information smoothly and easily, "28 frames per second ... MOS ... let's settle ... picture's up..." and he always puts in positive encouragements.

Marc, in a beige t-shirt and jeans with slightly thinning dark hair, has good energy. He doesn't like to say anything bad about anyone, which shows that he has experience on sets right off. Shawn, in a black t-shirt with buttons near the neck, jeans and a black baseball cap that he got from working on another film, calls out directions. He has blondish red hair and wears dark slanted shades, portraying an air that communicates that he knows what he is doing.

Martine, the costume designer, back from the first half of the shoot, says that she just moved to Los Angeles five months ago. William had arrived on set with the Sally Mann book, and while the shot with Marina crossing the street was being filmed I drove William home so that he could be in his own actor's space for his first scenes tomorrow. On the way, William

says it was different saying his lines with Samantha in rehearsal because she brings so much energy to it and he was paying attention to her and blocking out all the surrounding cacophony.

The next shots were of Stefan in his room with pale blue walls and two synchronized clocks. In order to get the two clocks perfectly synchronized, Teo had to take the glass off of them and move the second hands manually. One of them stops the moment that Gina brings about the end of the world, as we know it, and there is a shot of the clocks with one running and one stopped at 3:15 to drive home that something monumental has happened.

Stefan strums absently for a moment and then packs up his guitar in the first scene, then lies on his bed staring at the ceiling in the second. A film is never shot chronologically. It's quite a feat to organize the shoot according to location, time of day, etc. Paul got behind the camera and ran it for a couple takes on the first scene because his monitor was too far away around the corner and he couldn't cue. Paul positioned Trevor on the bed, especially his hands, for the shot, all the while consulting Sally Mann.

We finish the shoot minutes before going overtime. An hour of saying goodbye follows, thanking people, Mike and Peter, especially, for the use of their house, and meeting with Doug and Jeff. Jimmy and Jenny Daddabbo appeared on the scene, Jenny being noticeably pregnant.

Dinner was Thai food at home for Paul, William and I, then to bed as soon as we could stop talking.

It wasn't soon enough, for morning came around really fast as our alarms went off at 4:50 am. William and I took a shower together in a bleary haze. My heart was pounding with tiredness when I went to sleep last night.

William gathered up all his Ian things and consulted Paul on them. I was responsible for my stuff and Paul's stuff and we loaded the car and left as dawn was just breaking.

After being on the road for almost an hour, we finally began to see yellow signs saying *Mars* and a blue car at the same time that turned out to be Steve Sprung on the way to the set. We pulled ahead of him to lead him there. The countryside is beautiful, burnt hills and brush trees. We enter a gate marked by another sign, *Mars*. We have arrived on Mars.

There's something magical in the air as we drive through. We pass full sized sets once used to film westerns. And if you look closer you're as likely to catch a glimpse of a turn-of-the-century hacienda a couple hundred yards from the remains of Nottingham Castle. Later, after

exploring a bit, we find out there are hundreds of unusual sets hidden away in what appears to be a totally undeveloped landscape. All the isolated canyons give you the feel of being sheltered in terms of both space and time to imagine anything you want. We want Mars and so follow the signs and find the parking area where our grip trucks and cast and crew vehicles have assembled.

Up the hill, spread out under hundred year old oaks, are tables with food on them–muffins and coffee and veggies and a big tub of chocolate raisins. Next to this is another table littered with bug sprays: Off, Raid, sunscreen and pain relievers. Nearby there's another parking area with the familiar cars of producers and actors. And labeled tents are spotted–Makeup, Dressing, Production and Food Service. There are even deluxe, air-conditioned Port-a-potties, his and hers. Actually, they're more like little mobile homes. Our own little town on Mars! And all of this is nestled among the steep canyon lands and pristine hills of the Angeles National Forest.

William and Steve gather up their things from the trunks of their cars and we locate the costume and makeup area, a canopy with cardboard on the ground, director's chairs, folding tables and costume racks. Then we walk down to the location of the community in the woods.

As it comes into view among the foliage, I am amazed. It looks like a real, functioning community! People buzz around, stringing power cords, building structures. The ground is dirt with dried, fallen leaves. Holly and poison oak dot the landscape. Majestic trees overhang the whole area, with tall trunks and little leaves, creating a cool, shady canopy. There's a fire marshal here, a good-natured elderly man who says, "I've only ever had one person bit by a rattlesnake, and it was here." That's reassuring.

I see Dylan Kussman drive in and go to greet him. He's deeply involved in theater. He writes plays and has gotten one produced.

William wanders to the makeup area and is scrutinized by Aisha, the makeup artist, on board permanently for the whole second half. I ask him later if he got makeup and he said he didn't need any yet.

We come to Ian's tent, which is large and rectangular. It's a structure built of 4 X 4 wooden posts with olive green army canvas on the sides. As you step inside, the wall on your right is made from two sections of canvas. Their slightly different shades of green gives the impression they're made from surplus or throwaways. They're stitched together with heavy twine threaded through brass grommets. Teo did a great job imparting both a rustic look and

providing a convenient way to open any side, as needed by the DP to get close-up shots. The back is made from a single panel of contrasting brown canvas large enough to wind around and connect with a section made of an off-white drape material that carries down the left side. At the front, an azure-gray tapestry material with darker, slate colored stripes is formed into two flaps creating the entryway. A fox and a skunk skin hang from the lintel to the left. A straw hat hangs on a large tree to the right. The ceiling is formed by thick, opaque plastic stretched to both protect from rain and allow the insides to be illuminated by daylight. We didn't know it then, but the flapping of this ceiling would magically, as if on cue, play a major role in accenting a crucial dialogue between Gina and Ian.

Next to Ian's structure on the right is the tent of Pete and June, played by Steve and Christine. It consists of a maroon and navy tapestry with dolphins on it, cardboard, thick gray plastic for a ceiling and planks of wood on the front. The doorway is made from a thick, black tapestry with a beige and brown fish pattern. Various baskets, one shaped like a bivalve, decorate the front. A broom with a short handle hangs from the tree to the left that nearly blocks the entry. A small clothesline stretches from a smaller branch of this tree to another tree eight feet away. From this are hung a Hawaiian-looking beach towel and various clothes. To the right of the door hangs a rusted heart-shaped wind chime with tiny bells and one large clamshell. Woven baskets on the ground hold herbs, artificial berries and dried flowers. This gives an impression that the couple dwelling there are back-to-nature people, living most of the time out of doors.

Up the hill is another tent structure made from a woven rattan material; the stuff used for fencing or to add texture to an exterior wall. From a distance, it's the color of cut bamboo and looks aged, like it has been there for years. Its primitive look reminds one of old travel photos from New Guinea. Its delightful doorway is forked and made from two natural branches. Brooms and small tools, all showing age, hang from its sides. Bronze vases and one large snake-charming type basket are strewn on the ground out front. Its single rafter is a curved branch connected to another lashed to a tree and forming a supporting post in back. This is where Maneesh lives. Directly in front of his structure is a table made from scraps of wood with a sink in it. On this sits a large metal mug holding wooden cooking utensils and a pewter goblet holding toothbrushes. A side mirror for a car hangs from a makeshift shelf holding an oil lantern, a jar of incense and an abalone shell. A large 5-gallon bucket supplies the water.

Behind all of this is a large oak tree with a tall ladder leading up to one of its overhanging branches that's a foot and a half thick. The ladder is comprised of wooden rungs lashed together with thick, dark brown rope.

Tatiana's tent is an actual green tent, a little away from the others, with cloth flowers pasted on it, set lower down a small ridge about 30 feet away. By Tatiana's tent there are small rugs and a little square garden ringed with seashells. Another tent is set up behind Ian's to the left, maybe 30 feet back. A makeshift cylindrical bathroom of tin grating, some panels rusted, stands near this last tent. Black cloth nailed to a wooden doorframe creates a doorway in the back.

All these structures encircle a bonfire pit formed from large gray stones and realistic looking charred logs made of cement. Inside the pit is a hidden gas line connected to a propane tank. Not only do strict fire regulations discourage real fires, but this arrangement also makes adjusting the height of the flames on directorial command easy during the nighttime shots. Around this pit, serving as seats, are two old wooden benches, a gnarled log with branches forking up from its side, and half an old wooden barrel. Cut wood and an axe lie nearby, as well as an old rusted wheelbarrow. I am very pleased and impressed at the scope of the work and the many fine details that went in to bring the community to life. At the first opportunity, I express this to Teo and his crew.

As we get ready for shooting the daytime scenes around the fire pit, a white screen is erected to adjust the lighting under the leafy oak tree. Another silver reflective panel is brought down to light the faces of the actors. A green corduroy armchair is positioned against the tree just outside Ian's tent.

Before the real commotion begins, I walk around with Steve and do a tour of the set on video for the documentary.

Ivan, the transpo head, *yes, there is even a transportation department now,* came up to me this morning and said, "I have to say, I'm so glad to be here."

Jeff had approached me, asking if I noticed anything different about the crew, and I told him how many more essential crew there seem to be performing necessary roles on set as compared to the first half of the shoot. I extend my appreciation to Jeff and all his insightful hard work bringing a functional crew together, feeling good about what was to come.

For the next scene they switch from using a boom mike with a large gray cylindrical windsock to a smaller black nine-inch mike, which Kevin shifts from person to person as the actors talk.

Many members of the crew are now wearing colorful flowery bandanas in various ways: around their heads, covering their heads, down their necks under baseball caps. This is production's answer to the now very obvious bug problem that the location scouts had reported earlier. The bugs congeal around you in persistent clouds as soon as you stop moving, at just the right distance to be inhaled or to make you shake your head continuously. Michelle has rigged up quite an amusing anti-bug contraption. Her neon green bandana with white flowers is tied around her chin, pointy in the back, with a plastic wire grate taped to the bandana with blue electric tape so that her head is covered in a bubble. *That's a bit extreme, she looks like a bee keeper.*

Jeff comes up to her and laughs. "You look like you're fencing." Then he turns to me and a new production assistant named Katie, who is standing nearby. "I guarantee one of you will be wearing this by tomorrow." He dangles a red flowery bandana with a devilish grin.

"I'm hoping William's suggestion to take vitamin B-1 will help keep the them away. He said it helps better than bug spray if you take enough. They don't like the smell. Let's hope it works."

Doug wears one of the two actual black mesh facemasks on his head like an Arabic headpiece. These are the VIP bug repellants: DP and director only. The rest of the crew gets bandanas and bug spray, stockpiles of them on a small table next to the Crafty snacks. It was the best our budget could do.

They are now filming the scene around the bonfire where Stefan plays guitar and Tatiana, wearing a bright red evening dress, cries over her exile from normal life. The camera shifts perspective several times so the scene is filmed from many angles, with each actor eventually shot close up.

As production begins to experiment with the effectiveness of the different bug sprays, Dylan begins an amiable rant about Meatloaf being sued for fifty million dollars by the writer of *Bat Out of Hell* because of some unfair scam where the writer got a hell of a lot less than he deserved. Not surprising, artists rarely ever get their fair pay.

William strutted out of his tent with a scraggly black wig on that he had materialized from somewhere and announced, “Rasta Ian,” in Jamaican accent, “I-and-I give praise to Jah!” He sauntered around, enjoying his new persona, seemingly not bothered by the bugs. I thought, well, it’s either Vitamin B-1 or protection of the nyabinghi, the Rasta spirits of music, ya mon.

There were bugs buzzing everywhere. They were tiny and persistent; once they found you, they followed you around in little clouds and refused to be swatted away. The bugs didn’t bother me much, but they were definitely a significant factor in terms of filming. I tried to spray area bug spray, which I selected from the arsenal by the Crafty table, and it came out all globby, like spit, in the air so I shook it and tried again. I sprayed all around the central part of the community in the woods while the actors waited.

The whole situation was made worse by the actors having to wait around because there was a power outage. The generator we had was not powerful enough to run a bunch of appliances, such as the coffee machine, fans and computers, at base camp as well as the lighting needed at the set. We had to turn a bunch of it off and restart the generator.

Paul did wear a green bandana over his head but was so busy setting up the next shot and prepping the actors he didn’t have time to be bothered by the bugs. He also wears headphones around his neck for his monitor and carries a blue *Life on Mars* binder in his hand. Trevor, though, was so pissed he was almost throwing a fit, flailing in the air and snapping, “I feel like a goddamn wild animal.”

I gave him another application of bug spray and continued to spray the area spray, which was supposed to keep the bugs out of the shot. Then a bug flew right in Trevor's eye and he stumbled to the mounted car mirror swearing as he plucked it out.

Up at the costume and makeup area at the top of the little rise sits Martine on a director’s chair. She has a bandana on over her head and large, Jackie O sunglasses and is holding a lit bug repellant incense coil in her lap so that the smoke swirls right into her face. She is as scrunched into herself as she can be and looks miserable. In contrast, Aisha is jumping around, flailing her arms in the air and swearing, firing bursts of bug spray like random automatic fire into thin air. I am more amused than I show. They strike me as a comedy team.

“Oh my God, which one of you hates the bugs more?”

“Uh uh, don’t go there...” Aisha theatrically waves a discouraging finger in my face.

Many of us are in white or light gray t-shirts, due to a rumor that the bugs are kept at bay by these colors. There seems to be no convincing evidence to this fact, even though Paul and Doug thought there might be some correlation on their location scouts. In addition, many of us have also swallowed vitamin B tablets and have been pissing bright yellow all day. Maybe it's working, because the bugs don't seem to be landing on us, just buzzing around. Doug refused to take the vitamins, being wary of taking anything his system is not used to while filming, because he has such a critical role and can't afford to feel weird in any way. True to form, Michel is skulking around taking photos with his little digital camera. I ask him for a copy of one of Paul.

Enormous branches from the surrounding oaks grow parallel to the ground and interlace into a delightful canopy above that creates a mottled pattern on the forest floor. Sunbeams and shadows dapple the ground. Beside me, Teo and Amber are eying a lizard they've discovered on one of the oaks. Looking down at my watch, I realize it's five minutes until lunch. The day has whizzed by very fast for me. Shawn announces lunch.

Lunch was vegetarian lasagna, potatoes au gratin, broccoli and salad. There was plenty of chicken and beef teriyaki for the meat eaters. At lunch Teo starts throwing kernels of corn and hits Michelle in the eye. When he was on set before lunch break, he pocketed some sticks of incense from the prop jar by the sink, and now he restlessly begins to light one at the table.

I said, "That might draw the bugs. They like perfume smells."

Katie agreed. He lit it anyway.

Amber said, accusingly, "If everyone's telling you that, why are you doing it?"

Paul picks up the guitar after lunch while we are waiting to shoot and he and William sing *Percy's Song.* Paul stops as he sees his friend, Anna Lisa, parking in the lot across from our table. She came up from L.A. to watch Paul direct. Paul goes to greet her. As everyone walks back to the set, I notice a hammock strung up in the back of one of the equipment trucks. It will be a long time before anyone can use it.

Shawn announces the next shot. The crew has been busy setting up for a tracking shot of the community in the woods. As the ground slopes steeply downward, the rails had to be securely balanced on apple boxes and whatever else was handy. The camera is mounted on a wheeled platform and lifted onto the rails. A practice run is made to test the rails. Doug gets behind the camera and makes final adjustments for the shot. Everything's going well until the dolly grip accidentally backs him off the track. Luckily, it happened at the top of the slope

where the tracks were on the ground. Doug suddenly finds himself rudely jostled and then thrown off the cart. He picked himself up without a word, he wasn't hurt, but you could tell he was very perturbed, expecting at least a level of professionalism that he can live through. Few present understood how potentially disastrous this 'accident' could have been. If anything happened to the camera or more importantly to Doug it could have jeopardized the whole film. And this was something that should never have happened. The DP has enough to worry about and shouldn't have to check to see if safety stops were attached at both ends of the rails. They happened to be installed at the end where the rails were three feet off the ground.

As I stood watching with pride and delight, William comes out of his tent on the cue "Ian," and makes his first appearance on screen. He comes out with a rune book in his hand and sits in the green chair outside his tent. It was a little surreal to see him there in front of the camera, being immortalized in that strange, captivating world that unfolds before you on a big screen. Later, in full girlfriend mode, I told him I was proud of him.

Now there's a shot of William in his chair and Maneesh in the forked tree rolling a joint. Paul carefully positions William's hands resting on his stomach. There is a black 4'x4' square, called a flag, in front of him and Doug is shooting from his left side. A large white square, a reflector board, is poised above at an angle.

Paul says, "And cut ... all right, that's a check."

I start to walk away and turn around and see William is holding his head and going, "Ow ow!" One of the metal C-stands holding the black square is lying over him. People come running over and pull it off of him and swarm around him to see if he's okay. They run to get an ice pack. I could tell he was hurt. *What was that about a non-life threatening level of professionalism?*

"Oh my God, are you okay? Can I get you anything to eat or drink? The ice is on the way, we're on it ..." Katie bombards him with reassurances.

When the ice pack arrives, William immediately puts it on his head. After about 5 minutes, they remove the pack to check him out. No cut, just a small nick and a lump kept small by the crew's fast action. He thanks everyone and says he's okay. Aisha arrives and uses makeup to cover any remaining redness. Apparently, Tarina dropped a branch on someone's head earlier while she was holding it to create a more leafy background.

The next shot is Maneesh rolling the joint with Christine in the background putting lotion on her foot. Doug and Paul are both filthy from lying on the forest floor in their white t-shirts to line up the camera.

Ian says his first line near the end of the day in response to Mick saying he's going to tear Gina to pieces, "I'd like to see you try that."

"After Pete says his soup line, pause a bit before you say yours. Do you want to start with that?" Paul says to William.

"I think I'm ready to jump right in."

"Well, don't jump on it. Remember, give it time before you say your line."

"Was I jumping on it?"

"Not on that."

Shawn's voice cuts through the low din. "Okay, here we go, settle ... Paul, want to check the frame?"

Paul does.

"Okay, getting really close to shooting...okay, quiet please, rolling rolling!" That last phrase is one whole phrase, "rolling rolling," like "holding steady," not the usual enunciation of the same word repeated twice.

William is sitting in his chair and saying his line now. After the first take, Paul exclaims, "Very nice!"

More takes are filmed. William looks confident in brown shorts and a green t-shirt.

The last take earns a "beautiful!" from Paul.

Shawn sprints up. "Can I send every actor home except the speaking actors?"

Paul affirms his request. We are about to go overtime and are sending everyone home who does not need to be here.

"Okay," Shawn presses his walkie-talkie button on a wire pinned to his shirt near his mouth. "We need Gina, Ian, Stefan and Mick. You can send home everyone else ... Grip and electric is a wrap. Camera is not a wrap."

The next angle is on Mick with Ian and Pete being unseen speakers. Amber says her mikes are picking up voices talking back at base camp 75 yards up the hill. This is followed by another announcement from Shawn.

"Second meal is available at base camp, everybody!" We must be fed if we work more than six hours after lunch. Doug had to beat the light, so he didn't eat. Paul grabbed a bite, but not a meal.

Paul and Doug shoot one scene at the lake and then we are ready to go home. Paul comes up to his car and finds William reading his lines by flashlight in the dark.

"I didn't expect you to be so hardcore."

"Anything I do, I like to do well."

On the way back we stop at a drive through to grab a light meal for Doug and Paul before going home and to bed. Paul watches the dailies from yesterday and eats and showers. The last I see of him, he's a lone figure at his computer in the dark.

I grin through the jet of shower water at William, "I'm Ian's chick." We are showering all the smelly bug spray and dirt off in order to return to the same location and acquire a whole new layer of grime. Being a camper and outdoors lover, I mind a hell of a lot less than most of the cast and crew.

Morning comes all too quickly. It seems like we just got to sleep before we're up and rushing out the door heading back to the ranch. In the car on the way there Paul is trying to adjust the schedule so Marisa, who plays Tatiana, can go to an audition. He doesn't want to tell her she can't go and then have her waiting around on set. William sits with Paul's laptop balanced on his knees. He's just plugged his headphones in so he can listen to the poem, "Gefunden" by Goethe that he'll recite in German today in a scene with Gina in Ian's tent. It's amazing that in his first acting job, William must recite five stanzas from memory in another language. When he was a kid, he remembers some of his uncles speaking German on their farms in Southern Ohio. His great grandfathers had originally immigrated from Germany to this country in the 1860's. Paul told him that Fellini never recorded any dialogue on set; it was all dubbed in afterward. But for Paul, William will speak live. Paul is on his cell phone telling Christine that if Marisa can change her interview to an earlier time, then she can go to her audition, but she has to be on set and ready by 3:25pm.

Sable Ranch is in Placerita Canyon, maybe an hour outside of Los Angeles. Entering Sable Ranch for the second time, I notice a flat area with a dilapidated old house in the distance, an 18 wheeler truck parked in a clearing, a building straight out of the old west to the right,

another old building in the distance, a weathered barn with a wagon with red wheels and a bunch more buildings in a cluster on the left. The hills are rolling and beautiful, shrouded in fog at the moment. As we head up the dirt road to our community in the woods, I notice a set of four tree houses connected by aerial suspension bridges made of ropes and slatted planks. One can only imagine what kind of film was shot there. Our set is only separated from these tree houses by a wooded grove 50 yards wide.

On set, William gets his first real makeup job. He purrs like a great big kitty as Aisha sprays a fine mist on his face and pats him down with puffs.

"Am I pretty?"

"You're just gorgeous, hon."

As I stand by him, watching this, Aisha notices the amber pendant that William gave me and says it's beautiful and that she has one too. She turns to William and takes a picture of him, then removes his bib, "You're all ready." He asks for a mirror, illogically expecting to see a completely different face. "Wow! Very subtle." His skin is smooth and uniformly glowing, without blemishes or oily shine.

We walk down the hill to the set and find Paul coaching Samantha, "You're in a little bit more of a fuss ..."

Amber is having trouble with her equipment and is swearing. The mike, though tightened on the boom, makes a ton of noise as it's held above the actors' heads. She thinks its internal cable is defective. She's insistent about demanding money off of her rental fee. *Hmm, déjà vu,* I think, wondering how she got to be such a defective equipment magnet.

A few rehearsals are done with William and Samantha saying their lines as Paul watches. He asks for a few adjustments to their delivery. "Good, let's try it."

We're ready to shoot scene. "Rolling rolling ..."

"Wait! This isn't working. We have to figure out what's wrong, I'm getting screwed ..." Amber pauses production to do some troubleshooting.

The sun is starting to come out and Doug rechecks the lighting. Scene 69, take 5. Paul steps out from behind the monitor to watch the actors directly. He listens intently on headphones to hear if the noise in the mike has been eliminated.

"Put a little more inflection in the 'why.'"

"Why? ...Why? ..." William practices.

"Good."

Paul walks over to Samantha.

"You can come in a little more calm."

"Okay."

"Okay, ready? Lock it up, very quiet, please, roll sound, rolling rolling..." Shawn is a steady guide that moves it all along.

The scene plays part of the way through.

"How many others are going to end up like her?"

"Cut! All right, we got it, thanks."

There is a pause and William and Paul hunch over the book on Runes. William shows Paul a poem in the book that Ian reads as he sits on the bench until Gina's presence causes him to look up. It's so appropriate for the scene. The book's a prop that just happens to be perfectly suited for Ian's character. Teo must have had a burst of psychic intuition there. Earlier, Teo showed me his hand blown glass Runes which were beautiful and esoteric looking.

The camera is ready for the next shot. "'It's over' is more emotional," Paul is telling Samantha. "At this point you're not going to let yourself do it."

One more partial take and Paul gives the 'thumbs up.'

"I like how you read," Paul says to William. "That was just the right emphasis. I didn't want her to think you were coming at her."

Paul turns to Samantha, grinning. "'I quit' were the first two lines of acting I ever heard you say."

William asks for bug spray and Nick, one of the new PAs, sprays around him. They do another take of the scene when Gina starts to leave Ian and she plays the line 'it's over' more emotionally.

Paul says, "I like the vulnerability. I mean, it's okay here, but when she gets control of herself she's ..." he makes a firm, tough gesture.

"Oh yeah, exactly," Samantha animatedly agrees with a toss of her hair.

During the shoot, I am running back and forth to base camp, which is maybe a couple hundred feet away up a slight incline. I have done this maybe seventy times in the past two days. I am in New Balance sneakers with almost no tread, and every time I go down the incline, I turn sideways and go down in a sliding run. I suddenly remember Doug lamenting that he did not

bring hiking boots. The reason that I am remembering this is because, seemingly out of nowhere, the outside of my left knee started to feel achy, almost sprained. I ignored this for maybe ten minutes, and then suddenly I could hardly walk on it.

Hiding my limp, I approach the fire marshal and ask him if he has a knee bandage. He says he doesn't. *Isn't he supposed to be like, this amazing emergency response guy, and he doesn't even have a knee bandage?* I am annoyed.

Then Samantha asked me for an Advil and Shawn pointed out the first aid kit, "*fuck first aid" as Gina and Jennifer say in chorus in the movie*, so I got her some pain reliever and found a bandage for myself. It was not a thick elastic knee brace, but basically just sticky gauze that you use to wrap an absorbent padding in place over a wound. I wound it around and around and limped down the hill. William of course saw me limping and asked about it. I told him I was fine, it was just a little ache. He didn't need to be thinking about that while acting. He requested that I get tape from the first aid kit, which I did, and he wound it crisscross around my knee for added support.

Jeff saw the bandage and, wide-eyed and clearly frazzled, blurted, "What ...What happened? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, just another battle wound." I grinned conspiratorially.

He wasn't wholly amused. He started ranting about liability on the set in a most paranoid fashion. *Lighten up,* I thought, *I'm not going to sue my own brother.*

They're shooting from the other side now, same scene. There is a huge white screen, an 8x8 half grid, right behind William to enhance the light and one positioned up high to his right. *More falling projectiles,* I think, warily. There's a reflector screen set up on the right behind the high white one.

The next shot is just William with Samantha off screen.

I hobbled over to base camp to fetch Paul some tea. Paul ended up getting lukewarm tea because there wasn't enough power in the generator to keep the appliances on continuously for hot water.

"Sorry," Marc, in production, tells me.

"He understands," I reassure him.

"I don't want him to think we're not trying."

The next shot takes place inside Ian's tent, which is dressed in army/bohemian/zen decor. A bead curtain hangs on the left wall with a small crate under it. On the crate is a black cloth remnant, a plant and a flat incense holder with a stick of incense in it. A shelf hangs from chains wrapped around the post that serves as part of the tent's frame: Persian rugs, old, but colorful in reds and blues, line the ground. A picture of peasants in a poor eastern country hangs in the center where the bead curtain parts. A weathered table and chair are in the far left corner. On the table sits a scriptorium with a sheet of real papyrus on it, covered with occult-looking symbols. Months earlier Paul and William had exchanged e-mails about Ian's belongings, and the detail and creative thought that went into them shows.

Next to the scriptorium, on the left, are three crystal pyramids, a natural crystal cluster on a red clay base, and various maps William brought down of Cydonia, a region on Mars. Scattered on the desk to the right is a red kerosene lantern, a couple bottles of ink, a quill pen, and a red coil. Across the tent, against the opposite wall is an army cot with a ragged animal skin print blanket on it. A large Tibetan-looking incense holder hangs from the tent's ceiling structure. Some sage and dried herbs also hang there, and a wineskin and a small army pack hang in the corner.

Paul asked William if he felt comfortable with his surroundings. "For the most part, it's perfect, though I think I would be more comfortable with a blend that also suggested the alchemical, at least on my desk."

Paul says, "Anything that gets you more into Ian's character is fine with me."

"I just feel Ian would have less things."

Teo keeps overdressing the set and Paul and William keep asking him to take some of the stuff out.

"Not that your stuff is bad, I think it's great," Teo said to William, as William was clarifying what he wanted and didn't want in the tent. "I don't like any of it either right now." Teo looks down at his feet dejectedly.

Teo is stressed and working nonstop in charge of the ambitious set. He takes these requests too personally and acts like they're some judgment against his work. In fact, he's doing a great job; the items he chooses convey a survivalist feel that's definitely appropriate.

Attention is now on Katie, who is serving as a stand-in for Samantha. They move into a blocking rehearsal of scene 71. Here a blocking rehearsal delineates where people sit and stand and allows the camera to be set up for the shot.

"Good," Paul says, scrutinizing the action closely.

Samantha approaches him. "I have a question. First Gina says, 'I'm quitting,' then here she says, 'I can quit if I want to.' That seems inconsistent."

"Well, it's like she has calmed down, it's her last running through of the emotion, her last ditch effort for an 'attack,' although that's too strong of a word. She's starting to realize Ian's right. It takes hours to cycle through emotions like that," Paul explains, carefully and patiently.

"Yes... I think I understand."

Paul turns to William. "That last line, go deep for it."

William pauses and centers. "Is there a difference?" he recites.

Paul regards him. "What is Ian thinking here?" He coaches William to explore deeper.

"It's like there really is no difference and when you know such things, what can you do?"

"That's right!"

"I'm not teaching her anything," William says, with certainty.

"You're just bringing her back to herself--"

Without the faintest warning, the metal bathroom prop chooses this instant to collapse of its own accord into a crumpled heap. Paul and William look up with startled glances in the direction of the metallic racket.

"Art department!"

The art department runs over and begins clattering around, trying their best to resurrect the deflated cylindrical structure.

Paul turns back to William and Samantha, reading from Andrew Harvey's Rumi translations, *Speaking Flame.*

During the last take the actors didn't land on their marks perfectly and Doug wants another one. Paul and Doug both look like hobos, covered with dirt again from lining up the camera on the ground. There is dirt under our fingernails and when we blow our noses it is grainy and brown.

It's time to break for lunch; curry tofu and veggies, salad, rice and baked chicken. Over lunch, Michel is talking about this guy who's trying to beat the world record by ten days for going around the world in a speedboat. He said the guy had had liposuction and got a liter of fuel (biodiesel) from his ass that he used to power the boat. Several people look over at him in disbelief.

"His ass is the gas! That's insane!"

During lunch, every time William says something, Dylan snarls in his direction or makes a deprecating grunt. William couldn't figure out for the life of him what he had done to provoke that.

Stas was supposed to arrive at 2:30 and it's now 2:45. He's going to be shooting some documentary footage.

We resume shooting scene 70 in Ian's tent after lunch. The back flap of the tent is removed so the camera can get an internal shot.

Lots of little adjustments are made. An incense burner is lowered, a pillow changed, blankets are added. Paul instructs William to get rid of the book in his hand as soon as Gina and he enter the tent. As he follows Gina in, he puts it on a table across from the cot.

William's long dialogue scene with Samantha goes very well. The filmmaking spirits must have been there blessing us, because each time he starts to recite the poem, *Gefunden*, the wind begins flapping the tent as if on cue. The same thing happens for next two takes– each time the wind starts and stops on cue.

"That's exactly what the script calls for! You could see and hear it flapping on the monitor. Oh, God it was so perfect! It was so windy today; I thought that might be a problem. Do you think the audience will ever suspect the wind whipped up on its own? It was so amazing. It's like you were conjuring it up. Perfect!" Paul exclaimed, beside himself with joy.

Once, Doug actually left the camera between scenes. I looked over and he was gone. It was such a rare event that I noticed it. Except for lunch break, he never eats or drinks unless somebody brings it to him. The poor guy probably had to go to the bathroom.

There's going to be an insert of the actors' hands next, followed by the whole tent scene shot from a different angle. Then an added insert of Ian that Paul and Doug decided on at the last minute. They wanted to get a close up of Ian sitting at his desk writing on the scriptorium he had built in Paul's kitchen the week before.

The insert shot is from over Ian's left shoulder. Ian sits at his desk surrounded by crystals and maps, drawing alchemical symbols on the papyrus.

For the drawing scene Doug wanted background redressed.

"Where's the painting?" Doug asked, looking around the tent. William said Teo took it down.

The painting was one of the alchemical symbols for fire and water. It was one of six that William painted for Paul. The painting reappears. This time Teo mounts it on a garish animal skin. Paul asks Teo to take the skin down and put it back the way it was. As Teo exists, he throws a bent paper clip in with the neatly arranged pyramid crystals and slides another one of William's alchemical paintings further behind the kerosene lamp so that it would be half hidden. Paul and William look on in amazement. The whole purpose of this shot was to show Ian as an artist. In the process, the context was to allude to him as an alchemical adept. One could chalk it up as another minor turf battle if it wasn't being done in direct opposition to the director's repeated requests.

After the scene is dressed to Doug's satisfaction, I relax and notice my knee is feeling a little better. There's still one position where the pain's intense. Whenever I stand with my left knee lower than my right, it feels like it's been sprained.

The scene with Marina dead on the cot was shot based on a Sally Mann photo with little pine needles or something stuck to Sally's daughter playing dead. After this, we change location to a spot a few hundred feet into the woods. This is where Samantha and Tatiana have their metal hair clip scene.

I accidentally walk in front of the camera while they are shooting.

"Clear the frame! Clear the frame!"

So, it turns out that Kevin fell out of a van earlier. He wasn't hurt, and I have no idea how it happened, but that's what I heard. Then Michelle was pushing a cart and tumbled both the cart and herself straight into poison oak. Then Kevin stepped on three nails and they go into his foot. *It seems that Amber isn't having good luck with her boom ops, they keep getting picked off one by one, sort of like the keyboard players for the Grateful Dead that kept dying off in succession.* Then I run into Jeff with a bandage on my leg and he acts like the sky is falling in on him. Now I know why. We are all a bunch of bumbling stooges.

William and Samantha discuss how to create strategic silences in their dialogue. She told him it was a pleasure working with him and that she got a lot out of it and that his intensity helped her a lot. He said that at the beginning, he was paying attention to everything that was going on around him and then he noticed her disappearing within herself between takes. After his first long day, he realized that he could relax and let everyone take care of everything else. In fact, Samantha said that that was absolutely essential if he planned on surviving as an actor.

William is learning a lot. He told Doug, "I'm really starting to understand what you two are doing now. Each shot from a specific angle gives you a perspective, and then by adding other shots from other angles the scene becomes multidimensional. "

"The challenge is to add interest by shooting from as many angles as possible and in ways that nobody has done before."

It's a weird freeing feeling to do a night shoot. You're fed a meal you don't have to do anything about in this base camp setting, like being at war only with better food, and with better chance of survival, despite falling props. I loved sitting at the table with my heaping paper plate and putting on another layer of clothing as it got dark and carrying my flashlight, then walking away and tromping down the dirt road to the shoot. Amber gave me a new battery for my LED flashlight so I wouldn't get stranded, limping, in the woods.

Amber or her boyfriend got a contract to do the music for all the PBS documentaries. Her first one is on languages that are going extinct. I told her that that sounded really interesting.

"What I wouldn't do for a shot of Jager right now," she smiled. "You know, I've never worked virtually for free. If you told me I was going to be working for free I would have laughed. If the script weren't as good as it is I wouldn't be here."

"I find that Paul often draws that energy because he's what he is and does what he does."

"Yeah, Paul's great. I don't mind working for almost nothing because of the message. But Jeff comes up to Kevin and tells him that he's going to have to cut his salary, and I was so pissed. Kevin works his ass off and he's good, and I ended up giving him $50 out of my own salary."

This bothered me. You don't start paying someone and then tell them, oops, I can't pay you any more. Budget or no budget, that's wrong.

I brought Doug a few strawberries in a paper cup and he gobbled them straight down. William and the fire marshal are peering at the full moon through the trees. I come over and peer with them. In the meantime, they're testing the bonfire. It consists of fake concrete logs stacked above a circular burner through which propane gas can be regulated on command. It looks very realistic. Another shot is being set up with floodlights illuminating a small trail through the woods upon which Marina will come running and crying as she makes her way to the community. The lights are set up to mimic bright moonlight. It's ironic that the moon in the sky just happens to be full, but it's not penetrating the trees' canopy in a way useful for the shot. Teo comes up and says he saw a red bee without any wings and I realized that it was the red velvet ant I saw earlier.

It's taking a lot of time to set the lighting for this scene. A few of the lights set up early start smoking because their gels got too hot. The grips run around turning off lights and clothes-pinning fresh gels in place. As the grips make their adjustments, Marina plays Paul a live version of *Black Peter* on her iPod for this scene. Finally the lighting is ready.

Marina comes tearing out of the woods, running and screaming and crying in jeans and a black bra. What a powerful entrance she makes.

Repeated takes are needed to get everything right, especially the lighting. Marina asks for one more take. She insists she can dig deeper and bring more to this scene.

After she was done, she fell to her knees in a crumpled heap. There was maybe a ten second pause and I thought, *somebody go over to her!* Paul did, but it seemed like a long time for her to be totally alone and so vulnerable.

Paul's energy is with the actors while they are performing; he projects his intent. William said he could feel it. I said I could feel Paul's sensibilities too, and try to show him as I act out a raised anticipatory pose when his energy is up, then a deepening, which I illustrate with intense body crunched down like a tiger sighting prey. Paul snaps to attention, "Yes!"

Paul says that William naturally has poise and a centeredness that all actors have to learn.

William woke up with a scratchy throat in the middle of the night and I got him an Ilex. He went to Erewhon in the morning and I stayed in bed. Paul went out for something to eat and came back and slept. When William returned, he had brought me a Chinese tonic. Crew call was moved to 7:30 pm because we went three hours overtime last night, which means it was a

fifteen-hour day, not including travel time there and back. We need some rest before another long night.

Around 3 pm, when we thought everything was set, Paul gets a call telling him that scene 45, the shot around the bonfire pit, was out of focus. They immediately decided to try and re-shoot it. Last night, I had asked Marc for a call sheet and he said it was being revised. Later, when I asked him again, he said the same thing. Now, a phone call comes informing us call time has been pushed up from 7:30 to 4:30 pm. Paul and I gather our things, run to the car and rush to the set.

As William and Steve don't need to be there until 7:30 pm, it's arranged that they'll drive up together. Then, upon closer scrutiny, another shot is found to be out of focus. *Bah on all the fancy lighting hoopla if it's all a big blur!* Now Steve needs to be there for that redo, so William, who isn't in any of the redos has to leave immediately as there's no other way to get him to the Ranch. Even though he's going to be acting all night, his call time is moved to 4:30 pm. That'll mean a fifteen-hour shift for him. And that assumes there will be no overtime, which by now you have to be a fool to believe there won't be.

On site, the first thing I do is bandage up my knee again. I do this as a precaution because before sunrise I'll have run up and down the path a hundred times. The ache is markedly improved, surprisingly so in such a short time, actually, it is nearly gone.

"It's not a sprain," Paul said when I described to him what happened. "I've had that before. It's like a muscle you haven't used gets overstrained. It'll be stronger because of it."

With a whole two hours notice, Dylan can't make it to the re-shoot. *What a slacker,* I think, humorlessly, at the unreasonable request. Jeff runs around in his frazzled producer sort of way and selects Michel as Dylan's body double. "Okay, Michel, you're in the movie." The shot won't show Michel's face, just his back from the shoulders down, throwing logs on a woodpile. So Michel puts on Dylan's clothes and the retake is successful.

William had to set up his desk again and draw MOS. He's in a different t-shirt but Paul allowed the change.

Paul says he's really psychologically affected by moving along quickly with short shots. "You feel like you're getting a lot done even though when working on long shots you're usually accomplishing just as much. It's purely psychological but I feel energized, like, yes, we're really moving along."

With William there early, they're able to get the extra shots of him in the tent drawing at his scriptorium.

Steve and I take a short opportunity to sneak away to the nearby tree house set just down the road. We can only imagine what film was shot here and how long ago. But for us, we're here seeking adventure, like two delinquent hobbits.

"Wow, this is really cool, look at all these bridges!"

"Maria, check this out! You can sleep up here!"

"I'd love to camp here, wouldn't that be fun?"

There are ladders and bridges with plank flooring and rope handrails leading from one mini dwelling to another. There's even a lookout tower in one. We clamber around, peer out all the window holes like any self-respecting eight-year-old would, then slink back to the set.

"It's like Truffaut says, when you first start shooting a movie, it's, 'how can I make the best film I can make?' but when you get midway through shooting a movie you realize that it can't possibly exactly match your vision and you know you have to finish it. The thing becomes, 'how am I going to complete this film?'" Paul holds the experiences of filmmakers he respects close to his heart. The sharing of their experience has helped him to understand his.

Paul, hobbit that he is, has the *"Light of Elendil"* with him (a self-charging LED flashlight I gave him last year for Christmas). "That's great, I get to use it tonight!"

Christine and Marina have been friends for many years. They went to high school together. Each didn't know that the other was in the film and Paul didn't know that they knew each other.

Teo and I and another PA got assigned the task to catch a bunch of bugs for some nature shots. I found some good ones– a weird white and black bee-bellied beetle with a wasp waist and orange legs and head, an anthill during rush hour and a fuzzy black caterpillar. Aisha is deathly afraid of caterpillars. I found this out when she looked in the Styrofoam cup and let out a piercing scream before running away, with arms flailing. It got too dark to do any nature shots this time, so we reluctantly let all the bugs go like disappointed children.

"12mm high hat!" Doug bellows.

William and Marina are setting up for the shot where a very distressed Jennifer comes to after her flight through the woods, shivering and semi-coherent at Ian's feet. Paul imparts inspiration to everyone by showing a Sally Mann photo called *Last Light.*

"Okay, everybody quiet, full blocking rehearsal, be very quiet!" Shawn's voice pierces throughout the set.

They are taking a while to light the shot, and it is steadily getting darker. Jennifer is miked for this scene. Detailed rehearsals are executed, making sure hand positions are right and that the pauses between lines are just so.

A little bird cheeps forlornly on take 4.

"Ugh, that was almost perfect."

Paul requests one more take.

"That was awesome ..."

"Okay, camera on the move! Break for lunch. Half hour lunch."

I sat with Martine and Aisha and Brian. The conversation was a fast-paced comic rap.

"It's just like my screen saver," Aisha was explaining.

"Oh! Don't go there ..." Martine shook her head and waved her hand in exaggerated dismissal.

"What's your screen saver?" I innocently jumped in.

Martine shook her head at me in playful, but urgent discouragement.

"Don't go where?" I persist, intrigued.

"You don't want to go there."

"What's your screen saver?"

"Oh, it's of somebody's butt. A video someone sent me," Aisha said bluntly, without shame.

"It's of somebody's butt, like, doing things," Martine flailed her hands in front of her face with amused disgust.

"Really?" I laughed. *I can't imagine what that might be. Butt fucking? Taking a shit? What, what?*

"It's on her cell phone too," Martine added matter-of-factly.

"Do you have your cell phone with you?"

"No, no!"

There was a jovial feeling of bantering the whole time, a laughing off of the stress of long hours and minimal rewards.

"Where's the London broil?"

"The same place as my salary."

Everyone is hyper and tired. Michel is telling some story about the history of the Pepsi can. I had veggie patties, rice and beans and salad with honey mustard poppy seed dressing, which I was very grateful to Michel for.

Brian was joking about being fired. "Fire me, go ahead, somebody fire me, then I can go home."

"You're fired," Chelsea, one of the PA's, said.

"That won't work. I need somebody with authority to do it.

"I'm a Todisco, I'll do it ... You're fired," I pointed my finger authoritatively at him.

"You could never do that. I don't buy it. Paul wouldn't either ..."

After lunch, they set up for the same scene with focus on Tatiana now. I'm really proud of William, watching him up there in a strange new world and holding his own. I'm really proud of Paul too. I still sometimes stand back and think, *Paul is the one who initiated all this, the one who made this all happen, this is all happening because of him–he waved his wand and said, "This is MY dream!"*

Floodlights are pointed towards the community in the woods from the path now, since it's dark. Other lights are positioned behind the large white 8'x8' translucent screen to give a muted glow as if coming from the campfire. One by one, four flickering mechanisms, called random dimmers, which are attached to floodlights to imitate a bonfire's light fluctuations, have all malfunctioned. They either flicker madly like strobe lights at a rave, or fail to flicker at all. Doug tells the grips he needs the flicker effect now! But, it's not their fault because the little devices are just pieces of shit, as he finds out by wrestling with them himself. Maybe, because of the great discount we're getting under the new filmmaker's program, we've been given all the old or malfunctioning equipment in their inventory. As we need the effect now, they improvise on the spot by having two lighting grips manually vary the intensity of each light. It works perfectly.

This all has to be simultaneously coordinated with the guy who operates the flow of propane gas to the circular burner under the realistic-looking but fake inflammable logs. It takes a few rehearsals to get this all down so it can happen on cue during the shots. Because of the ultra-strict fire regulations at the Ranch, the guy manning the propane tank must be a licensed professional. No improvising on that account. That's all he does. As a result, he's very good at faking realistic fires. As all of this goes down, Paul is telling Christine and her friend about his experience at Lucas Ranch for a private screening of *Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones.* It was interesting watching him tell this story as if he wasn't in the least concerned about all the delays they were having getting the bonfire effects operating. Then, just before they announced they're ready, he turns as if he was following their progress all along, "Ready, guys?"

I've become used to seeing William before the camera, as if 'I'm dating an actor' has been part of my experience of being with him all along.

"Here we go rehearsal's up quiet please!" This is Shawn, and he says it as if it is all one word with no breaks.

"Action rehearsal!" Paul announces.

The shot is a straight on of Jennifer and Ian now. Jennifer is lying at Ian's feet and just comes to. Ian helps her sit up and she tells the group that "it is all over."

"I don't want to say 'shh' to her because she's facing away from me and I don't want her to think I don't want to hear what she has to say," William tells Paul.

"Okay, let's try it without it."

They run through the scene a couple times without incident.

"Pick up..."

A marker flashes in front of the camera, "56B take 4 PU."

There's a close up of Ian and then a close up of Jennifer.

Sometimes the crew gets interested in the plot of the film even though they have no idea what it's about. I took a minute to explain the script, at least the way I saw it, to Mike Dennert and Katie.

There's a picture wrap for Dylan first. Then for William, then for Steve, Christine and Marisa, all amidst applause. William looks pleased and relieved when his name is announced.

It had been kind of odd that Dylan, who plays Mick, hadn't been getting along with William during the whole shoot. Every time William said something at lunch, he would sneer or grunt in disgust. Dylan, who played the redheaded child star of *Dead Poet's Society,* was the only seasoned actor on set with the exception of Jesse Eisenberg. After it was announced that his role was a wrap and everyone applauded, Dylan bounded up to William and shook his hand.

"Hey, man, it was great working with you!" he grinned, pumping William's hand up and down exuberantly. William smiled back disconcertedly, and then abruptly realized that Dylan had been in character the whole time, from the minute he drove on to the set. Part of Mick's role was to be always annoyed by Ian.

We wrapped at 4:30 am, right on time, shuffled to the production area and there, like a veritable holy vision, was a hot breakfast of eggs, hash browns, bacon, western omelet and veggie sausage sandwich.

"You've gotta be kidding me," I heard someone exclaim behind me. I was so grateful for the food and heard waves of comments all around me to that effect. Sitting out there in the barely-beginning dawn, breathing dew-rich air and eating eggs and hash browns in the woods was a near-religious experience for me. *This is what it means to be alive, I mean, yes, really alive, hallelujah!* Everything was so fresh and new and engaging. I was awash in the blessings of nature, grateful for my body and the senses that are granted me; my faithful lungs which I treated badly by not taking care of them were allowing me to breathe this fresh air, so forgiving, bringing me life faithfully and asking nothing in return for this most precious of gifts, and I was stricken with tenderness for them, what did they ever do to me to deserve the kind of neglect I gave them? My eyes see the growing dawn wherever I choose to look, here and there and everywhere, my hands bridge the natural world with my body, an interaction more immediate than mere perception, they work for me, tirelessly. How many things they've touched! How many things I've felt! How much love there is in the world!

We watch the previous day's dailies at this 5 am dinner on Doug's computer. William comes on the small screen, instructing the group to let Gina do her thing. "Nice! ...Very good! The man of the hour. You can tell just from watching this that he's not bad because he's underplaying it. He remembers what I tell him to do when he acts." Stas looks over Paul's shoulder and I do the same from the other side. Paul continues his half-conscious running commentary as he sits, absorbed. "Good, she's good! It's amazing. I'm using these people and

they're not actors and it's a lot of money and all that ...like Milos Forman did… and it's *William*..." he's realizing, objectively, as he speaks, what he's done with his friends and the stuff in his head.

We leave for home, Paul trying not to fall asleep at the wheel. William does his part by rambling on about everything and nothing in a constant stream to keep us all awake, especially Paul. As we get closer to LA, Paul puts on music and we all sing along, too loud and too desperate. We don't get to bed until after 6 am.

Needless to say, I didn't sleep too well, but it was an easy day. William went off to Erewhon for a recuperative tonic drink and I managed to do laundry for Paul, William and myself. I was able to rest although I didn't sleep enough.

William sold one of his mμ-Ankh energy pendants to a masseuse at Erewhon for $40 and a 20 minute back massage and took me out to Luna Park with the money. We held hands the whole time and I ordered spaghetti with capers, olives, basil, garlic and feta cheese. It was delicious.

William told me that Paul said he could always tell when an actor has worked with their script. Paul had always thought of William's line, "We have to keep Mick out of it for as long as possible," as one phrase, but when William read it, he placed a dramatic pause after 'out of it' and delivered the rest of the line to himself as he pondered how impossible that might be. Paul said that that was brilliant.

We watched dailies of the first two days of the shoot. Paul liked Gina's annoyed look at the devil who approached her at the party.

"Marina is so much better in this half. She's more natural. Sometimes it pays to do a movie in two halves."

"I look so rotund," William comments. "I've gotta lose weight."

"You sound like a prima donna actress," Paul grins affectionately.

Chapter 11

Something Smells Fishy

Come morning, William is packed to fly back to Portland. He approaches Paul, both hands balled into fists and extended towards him.

"Do you want to decide or do you want the gods to."

"The gods," Paul responds, looking down at the balled hands.

William extends his hands closer, both still closed. Paul pointed to the left hand and William opened it to reveal a crystal pyramid that was on his desk in the film. Paul's eyes grew big and he took it and admired it, turning it over and over. William watched him fondly for a long pause.

"It's yours."

"This is for me?" Paul was softly surprised. "Thank you."

We went to Cafe Verona to eat. I interviewed Paul about the rest of what he had to say about the script. The owner's daughter is in the film as an extra in the nightclub scene. *The least he could do is give the director a free meal,* I thought. I had *Creme Rice Dolce*, which was something like breakfast oatmeal but made from rice instead with lots of tender raisins and warm coconut milk. It was so delicious and very filling.

After eating we went back to Paul's place and William and I took a shower. As we got dressed, we talked briefly to Mom and Dad and they are glad that production is going well. Then we all drove to Burbank for the Hobby Store shoot. Paul had William come along to catch a ride to the airport. He had Paul sign his script.

Our base camp today is in a tiny parking lot behind the Hobby Store. We barely have room to unload the equipment. Doug was uncharacteristically late to the shoot today because Katie took a wrong turn and ended up at Fillmore. It wasn't his fault, but you could tell being even a few minutes late is something he never does.

It is hard to believe, but this time we have all the necessary permits. The first shots will take place on a quiet side street across from a schoolyard. There we'll shoot the scene where Gina throws one of the chemistry sets on the sidewalk and jumps up and down on it. For contrast, the backdrop will be a row of small, modest houses with neatly kept yards. Next, there's the scene with the girls walking down Elmwood and entering the Hobby Store. Finally, we'll move inside and shoot the scenes in the store where Gina buys her five chemistry sets for her brilliant master plan.

Along with the permits comes a friendly police officer named Jeff. It's a great relief to have the police officially on the set, instead of having to keep a look out for them like we did in Laguna Niguel. There the police would have shut us down, here they protecting us, probably mostly from ourselves. Paul asks Teo to have the sacrificial facsimiles of chemistry ready for Gina to smash during the sidewalk shots. Teo has made extra chemistry boxes by photocopying the covers and constructing boxes the same size.

Once we unload the lighting equipment, set up the makeup station, the Crafty and production tables, most of the crew restages out on the side street. As we arrive in position, the kids are playing and yelling in the playground of the school across the street, their voices carrying on the breeze. As they're using a new Steadicam, it takes time preparing it. All the scenes will be moving shots, so everything takes longer to set up. Sound cables must be lengthened, mobile reflector screens selected.

It takes more than two hours before shooting begins. Time is of the essence. Shawn beholds the lengthy preparations with undisguised disbelief. At one point he smiles pointing to his watch. His exaggerated smile is asking, "We ready?" As if the Universe supports his impatience, at that moment the bell in the schoolyard sounds and all the children disappear inside.

Finally, Shawn, with a real smile of relief, announces rehearsals. First, the actors run through a rehearsal with Paul directing. Then, the choreography is worked out for the large group that must travel with the moving action.

A whole entourage shuffles in a fast backward walk in front of Gina and Jennifer dancing and singing down the street. It's very strange to shoot a scene with two girls dancing down a deserted street and being a member of a dozen people silently walking backwards. Included in this shuffling mob are Amber and I and Kevin handling the sound equipment, two grips carrying large white reflector squares aimed skillfully at the actors' faces, Paul with his portable monitor, Doug and the Steadicam operator. Getting a successful tracking shot is definitely a group effort.

This is my first experience seeing a Steadicam in action. It's a complicated contraption. At one end, the camera is attached to an iso-elastic armature and gimbals that mechanically isolate it from even the smallest movements of its operator. Opposite this is a counterbalance composed of the battery pack and detachable monitor. All of this hangs off a harness attached to the waist and over the shoulders of the operator. Once it's all set up, the operator can walk along with the camera tracking in smooth, fluid motion. It looks very heavy, because it is. Doug is not the operator of the Steadicam, but can impart instructions to the Steadicam operator.

Amber gets up to stretch her legs and comes over to show Paul a Tool CD with 3D glasses built into the cover. We all take turns looking through the viewer at the 3D photos inside.

For the last hour, they've been trying to find a ride for William to the airport. Nothing is available. The transpo department seems suddenly non-existent. William slips off without telling me where he's going. A half hour later he returns.

"Where did you go?"

"I went to the liquor store and bought Teo and the art department a bottle of Jägermeister."

"You gave Teo a bottle of Jägermeister?" Knowing how short on cash he was, I ask incredulously, "Why?"

"To make it interesting. No, actually, just to thank them for all the support they gave me." While I'm still having difficulty understanding his gesture, Jeff comes up and says, reluctantly, "Come on. I guess I have to take you to the airport."

We say our quick goodbye tenderly.

This is the conversation William had with Jeff during the short ride to the airport. After throwing his luggage and briefcase into a large van, they head off and Jeff reiterates how this is

really a bad time to be asking for a ride. "Didn't you notice how short-handed we were? Everyone's busy doing something."

At this point, William was dreading how this could turn in to a very long, short ride. After pulling onto the expressway, Jeff starts in again about his inopportune timing. In defense, William says, "I know, that's why I took the time to help out the art department in a big way."

"You did? How?"

"I just gave Teo a bottle of Jägermeister."

Even in traffic, Jeff does a quick double take. "You gave him a bottle of Jägermeister?" he exclaimed. Without waiting for an answer added, "Why?"

"For all the effort they made in making the community in the woods a success."

Jeff is momentarily silent, searching for a response. As they drive up to the terminal's curbside drop off, he says, "Ah, well, that was very nice of you. Hey, thanks a lot. Ah, we'll have to get you back down here for the film's premiere."

"Thank you for ride."

Back on set, Paul asks me if they ever found a ride for William. "Yes," I told him. Then, I'm asked to go back and help Amber. The area is heavily Mexican and just as we're ready to shoot, the school lets out and parents *en masse* start arriving to pick up their kids. As if there wasn't already enough activity on our 'quiet' street, it now erupts into a big flurry. We decide to wait a few minutes to let the mass migration from the schoolyard disperse. In the interim, Stas shows up on set with his video camera. Paul is showing me his portable monitor and we are on it because the camera is pointed at us. Doug gives his final instructions for the Steadicam shot.

After the street empties, the whole crew amasses and, on cue, begins to shuffle backwards as fast as they can; I am carrying the sound cords so nobody trips. We make a hell of a scuffle, and it's amazing that we are totally ignored by the actresses, that is, until we collectively crash into Amber's sound cart. The stooges strike again.

Stas comes around and videotapes me and Martine as I tell her about my makeup and costume in *Freak*, how Paul had me dress up as a bar floozie in a tank top that was so tight it had to be pulled over my head by the costume designer. Then he had my makeup overdone in '80's style: blue eye shadow and black eyeliner and dark pink lipstick and rouge. He had my hair teased and sprayed until there were tears in my eyes from all the pulling and I looked like a bona

fide ‘80’s fashion rocker type, a style Paul and I both find extremely unattractive. Martine is laughing animatedly.

At some point I got recruited to take notes for Amber. She needed someone to write down her records for each take regarding the sound. The gate was bad on one take that Paul really liked and when he found that out, he grabbed his stomach with a grunt and bent slightly in disappointed nausea.

Amber and Kevin were starving. For some reason, the Crafty food didn’t make it on location. The shoot is three or four blocks away from base camp, too far to be convenient.

“Michel isn’t doing his job ... he’s not my favorite person,” Amber grumbled.

It’s such a crazy thing, the whole work crew, laden and shuffling backwards in front of actresses who are acting like they’re just dancing down the street all by themselves.

We’re now moving in front of the hobby shop.

Shawn ambles to the new location, shaking his head. “Doug’s killing me. It’s just not good enough for him.”

They’re putting colored tape on the sidewalk so the actresses know where to land. The Steadicam is attached to the operator’s torso and is balanced so it can be maneuvered smoothly. They make adjustments to the gimbal so the camera is positioned for the next shot. The operator gets final instruction from Doug and detaches the camera, then its armature from the harness. The camera is never carried for more than a few minutes at a time. Whenever the operator is not taking a shot, the whole camera assembly is hung up on a portable rack until the next shot.

Shawn walks around twirling his watch and vibrating his lips with impatience. We’re setting up in the Hobby Store around a metal bin of puzzles. Shelves of toy cars and trucks and glue and model-making tools fill the store. There are paints and magazines and large airplane and spaceship models hanging from the ceiling. Floodlights and opaque screens are set up outside the front window pointing towards the cash register, which is up front on one side near the window.

There’s a rehearsal taking place and Paul holds his portable monitor, scrutinizing every movement and expression. After much preparation, they shoot the first take of the portion of the scene in which Gina and Jennifer rummage through the green metal grate bin, discussing the dinosaur puzzles.

It's hot, though I am comfortable enough, snatching minutes to scribble in my notebook when I can in some remote corner of the hobby shop. Jeff brings in ice cream and hands it out. People receive the ice cream gratefully. Paul munches on an ice cream on a stick while he works.

Lunch is served outside behind the store in a small parking area. I eat potatoes, sweet cabbage and carrots and salad. There's lots of chicken for those who want it. During our short mealtime, Amber tells us about how her son, Ryan, who is now seven, went through a "terrible twos" phase where he got his arm stuck in the hole of the toilet bowl. "I flushed Batman down the toilet!" The plumber came and had to crack the bowl to get him out because the suction worked like Chinese finger cuffs. Then Ryan poured a whole bottle of laundry detergent on the kitchen floor for "slip and slide hour." The plumber was there several times within a couple weeks.

She then told a story about her equipment being stolen on set and the producer went around knocking on doors and found it and threatened the guy until he gave it back. So that was why I spent half an hour watching it and talking to the on-set cop while we were setting up for the scene on Elmwood.

Paul said that the Hobby Store shots were originally going to be filmed at the Discovery Store, but the manager who approved it left before the shoot and the new manager didn't want to do it.

It's now nighttime and all the front windows and the door are covered with what looks like wax paper with floodlights shining through. Doug's testing out and positioning every light on the copious track lighting of the store. He tells Tarina to change a bulb. Shawn walks by shaking his head. Now Brian is up on an apple box turning the lights this way and that to Doug's satisfaction.

Paul is telling me that the nightclub scenes coming up will be about four minutes on screen and will take a whole day to shoot. "There are lots of long shots and little dialogue. Like, the whole movie," he self-reflectively smiles.

It's ten minutes of ten. Shawn speaks up; he's not shy. "Okay, let's go, we're an hour and ten minutes away from being done. Then we gotta go. Okay, we're back in business, back to one, okay guys, settle, very quiet please let's roll sound rolling rolling," he rambles on in his familiar speech unbroken like a river.

"Samantha step forward one inch!" Doug calls out.

"Action!"

Between takes, Paul looks over the shelves at Stas and sings an excerpt from the musical episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and they share their own moment of camaraderie built on twenty years of friendship amidst all the hubbub.

I am sandwiched between rows of shelves behind Kevin holding the boom mike. There are cubicles of magazines to my right and shelves of completed truck models in little boxes to my left. Paul is in the next row to my left and we peer over the shelves and make faces at each other.

We wrap at 11 pm, right on time. Paul is interviewed by Stas outside. Ivan tells us to go home and go to sleep and I agree.

We take Doug and his luggage back with us now that William is gone and go through a drive through and go back to Paul's and watch the dailies from the woods scenes. William looked good. "There he is, so steady..." Paul says.

I woke up late and went with Paul through a Burger King drive through. We're listening to The Go Team, the band that sings the song that plays at the beginning of the *Life on Mars* trailer. Doug got picked up by Katie to light The Smell club at 11:30 am.

We listen to the *Fire Walk With Me* sound track in the car and Paul says, "A primitive writer would have her voice express what she feels, really straightforward. But it's genius to have someone else express it through a song and have her cry in the scene."

We drove into a couple parking lots looking for the right one and pulled into the one with the canopies up as soon as we spotted it; base camp. The club is in an alleyway with painted brick around the door and a yellow neon sign that says, "The Smell" above it. A dumpster totally covered in graffiti stands to the right and, appropriately, it smells.

To the left is a wooden desk just inside the door. A glass panel covers it, and under the glass panel there are all kinds of photos and postcards and kids' drawings. A sketch of a hand with different colored fingernails and a green unicorn has "place hand here" written above it, evoking Gina tracing her hand at the kitchen table. Van seats line the wall to the right.

Beyond the desk to the left is a tiny bar that serves non-alcoholic drinks, cookies and Cliff bars. A small glass counter displays local CDs for sale. The place is long and thin, like an

old warehouse, which it probably is, and is filled with weathered, grungy furniture lining the walls. An old brick archway stands about a third of the way in. The wall to the left is brick and plaster and the bathroom to the right is striking black tile with a dirty sink and toilet and colorful graffiti plastered absolutely everywhere else; floor, walls, ceiling...gutter punk.

The art department has constructed a wall to make the club look smaller and painted it green and red. Beyond that is the dance floor area and stage. I was a stand-in for the singer, standing on apple boxes and staring into lights so bright somebody brought me sunglasses I was squinting so much. For some unexplained reason, by the bathroom there is an unfinished-looking room with sheet rock on the bottom and 2x4's on top so you can see in through the boards.

Paul told Teo to paint the divider of his makeshift wall green and there's now wet paint and Paul said, "Put a sign up here. Let people know they've been warned. Also, the bathroom is the only bathroom here and they're shooting in it now."

The ceilings are very high and made up of different colors, some parts unfinished and two-tone, some parts just rafters with no sheet rock, like near the door. None of the room partitions reach the ceiling. Our equipment tables and carts are lined up along the walls. The room all together is nearly a couple hundred feet long.

Jeff shows up, bustling and ready for whatever the day will bring, in a straw hat that looks hand woven that he bought in Brazil.

I walk into the bathroom to get Paul to sign a form authorizing use of his credit card and I find him crouched on top of the toilet between the camera and the wall.

"I don't feel good about this at all. I don't know ... I don't feel as emotionally prepared," Marina was confiding in Paul.

The green makeshift wall has been moved back to dry so people don't bump into it. Marina walks out, unhappy, vibrating her lips in desolation.

Paul grabs me and wants me to meet Becky Stark, the lead singer of the band, Lavender Diamond, which is going to perform their song *You Broke My Heart*. Becky is a thirtyish flowing new age dynamo eagerly into Carl Jung. She told me that her mother just became a minister of unity church, which offers a mixture of eastern and western beliefs. They believe that Jesus was not a god, but an enlightened human being. I tell her that I studied both eastern

and western theory during my Ph.D. and she is all excited. I am talking to her as she is getting her makeup done behind the stage.

"You know, I heard *You Broke My Heart* in my head one day while I was walking around, I heard it all day. I went into this obsessive space and had to write it down." She laughs at herself brightly.

There's a steady droning music noise from the club next door, which is going to cause the sound department to have to do voice-overs to eliminate it. There's so much going on at any given moment that Paul has to be aware of.

People come up and stop short at the bathroom while the shoot is going on in there. Paul is tenderly coaching Marina as she enacts the scene where she is emotional at the bathroom sink.

"Shit, I have to take a friggin' piss. Can't I even take a piss in this place?"

There's a lot of noise coming from the club next door. Ivan goes over and tries to pay them for an hour of silence, a buck a minute, they want. Ivan offers $40 and comes back self-satisfied, he has trouble-shooted and fixed the problem, thank you very much. A half hour later the music comes back on and Ivan goes over to protest and they say that's more time than we deserve, it should have been fifteen minutes. He offers $60 more for a total of $100 and they say no. I walk out there later and a black woman with a tortured scowl and a beer belly and scraggly black hair is standing outside on her cell phone. Four security guards crowd around me as I approach.

"This is a club for guys."

"Oh, I know, I just work next door and I heard music and I wanted to see what was happening." I abort my attempt at taking things further, realizing she basically called the cops and there's nothing else to do, and act all sweet and innocent. I peek in and there are red upholstered chairs at the bar. A gay bar, probably.

Jeff is snapping at someone on his cell phone.

"Where is the first aid kit, do you know? You mean you packed everything else up and left it there? Well, that thing's worth, like, $700, we've got to get it back." Apparently, the art department packed up and left it in the woods. They even knew exactly where they left it, by the trees behind where Pete and June's tent was. I remember seeing it there.

Martine is busy stringing paper clips together in a chain and hanging them on Chris' ear. Ailee and Chris are playing with tools with flower-patterned handles, a box cutter and screwdriver. Aisha is preoccupied with playing Garage Band on her laptop. Doug has moved back out of the bathroom to continue lighting the long shot of Lavender Diamond performing their song.

Over a dinner of middle-eastern food, Marina says she's sorry William left without her being able to tell him, "Good job."

I was an extra in the club scene and got makeup, a spray-on foundation and eye makeup and expensive brush-on lip-gloss. I told Aisha that I saw why William was ecstatic and she laughed and said she'd never seen anyone as cute as he was about getting makeup.

In the club scene, I stand with Katie talking and telling her about my amber ring, my platinum ring and my little diamond in white gold. She tells me she got her claddagh ring on her trip to Ireland as well as her three-leaf clover necklace; both have inset Irish marble stones. Her best friend also has a claddagh ring and they wear them all the time. I tell her about the graduation ring Bridget gave me and the ring I bought her and that we do the same thing. We have to continue making mock conversation in whispers as if we're talking in a bar while the shoot goes on.

The scene when Marina walks to the stage and hears the song is finally being shot, and the song is outrageous as it plays. The light on Becky's face is suddenly yellow, which highlights her sky blue flowing dress against the red curtain background. Then the light on her turns blue, leaving just a hint of gold highlighting her hair like a halo, then a pinkish red light illuminates her body. The whole effect, coupled with the song itself, a kind of building spiritual march, is so powerful I become entranced and my heart swells with awe. Tingles run up my spine and in my head and I love life and want to make all the changes I learned I needed to make when I was ill all at once. The fan blows her dress softly and she looks like a goddess. That's the first thing I say to her after the shoot. Paul said, "Becky is a goddess of love and a wind elemental. I wanted her to have a halo. Doug is great at theatrical lighting and was, like, 'sure I can do that.' But for Jennifer, this extremely open state lets everything in, all the love and all the suffering in the world, and it is sudden and she's unprepared for it and it's too much and she dies."

Suddenly, without warning, the tripod *without the camera, thank God,* tumbles off the dolly cart in a raucous clatter. A light had come crashing down on the dolly cart, which slid off the track with the impact. The grip and lighting guys were rushing around, setting up for a shot following Marina off the dance floor. Jeff had just nervously announced that we had to wrap early. A bunch of people scramble around and pick everything up. We wrap at 1:15 am, instead of the original 2 am on the call sheet. It is unclear whether or not we got everything we needed from the shoot. We seem to trash every place we go and then have to clean it up in the middle of the night. Food litter, water bottles, colored tape, camera equipment, just a lot of people scrambling around with a lot of equipment on a tight schedule making a mess and making a movie in the process.

Paul, Stas and I stand outside the Crafty truck as people begin to pack up.

"Are there any more of these sports drinks?" Stas turns to me and asks.

"Yeah, they're right here." I grab one out of their plastic-wrapped cardboard case in the truck.

"Is there any red?"

"No, they're all orange up front."

Paul sees me drinking mine. "Can I taste that?"

"You want one? I'll grab you one."

"No, I just want a sip." I hand him the bottle and he takes a taste and scowls in disgust. "Ugh! It tastes like fish ass!"

Aisha, Stas and I, within earshot, crack up.

"Fish ass? Where'd you come up with that?" I laugh.

Aisha is wiping her eyes. Cryptically, she starts talking about her great grandmother. "My great grandmother, who was this sweet old lady, would put on these rings with huge jewels when she went out and wave her fingers in the air. She would come out with these strange comments at dinner, like, 'it tastes like a sack of assholes ...'" *Oh, so now the connection becomes clear.* "And we'd all turn to her, like, *what*? But she wouldn't comment. And then months would go by and she'd suddenly say, 'it tastes like a sack of assholes ...'"

By this time we were all doubled over laughing, exhausted, with tears running down our cheeks.

"It's fish ass!"

"Fish butt!"

"No, I've had butt before and this is not it."

"Ha ha, okay, we're all friends here now ...."

As I grabbed some coiled cables and began bringing them to the grip truck, two or three people thanked me. Ailee took some heavy sandbags from me, mentioning my knee, and one of the grip guys relieved me of a heavy cable. Though I knew it was there, I didn't know that the tension on set about the long hours was as high as it was. It turns out people were threatening to walk off.

Greg said something behind me, like, "Feel the tension? ... Tension release." I was not sure what he meant by that, or even if it was directed at me. *Does he think I'm not working hard enough?* It hurt my feelings a little.

"Why did we wrap at 1:15?" I asked Paul. The whole thing seemed kind of abrupt and sudden, and I thought we were working until 2 am.

"Certain crew members were grumbling," Paul lamented. "Jeff told me that it would take three hours to pack up. It actually took only a little more than one."

"I guess we were all done around 2:20. I was helping carry stuff out. So were Jeff and Ailee."

"They always do."

"Did you get all the shots you needed?" I asked casually.

"No." *Wow,* I thought. *I didn't really expect a 'no.'* "Jeff didn't tell me until 1 1/2 hours before we had to leave that we were leaving early."

"That's really unfortunate. You can't be ruining your shoot," I paused, pondering this. "I know the crew was here at 11:30 am. They worked a long day." Crew call was originally 2 pm, but it got pushed up to 11:30 am due to the complexity of the lighting for the club scenes. Also, the call time had been pushed up just a couple days before when the out of focus shots were redone in the community in the woods.

"It's like that on every movie," said Paul, with terse certainty.

"This isn't every movie." I had to interject, seeing the legitimacy of the disgruntled buzz on set first hand as well as Paul's earnest perspective. "This is a low budget movie in which most people are working for free or for $50 a day. That was a 14 hour day."

"I understand, but Jeff gave me misinformation."

"I see your point. He shouldn't have done that. He should have said that even if it takes an hour to pack up it's still 14 hours and they need food or whatever he was thinking. If you just got a $5 sandwich to them or Taco Bell even it would change the climate of the whole thing. People need their meals on time. They need proper meals." I remembered noticing that a couple salads and sandwiches made their appearance on set for the people who had been there 12 hours, but they were not the only hungry ones and the others just looked on, confused.

"They are getting proper meals," Paul almost snaps. "And everything extra comes out of my own pocket."

I am astounded and feel immediately protective. "What? It shouldn't! Let production pay for it. It's a legitimate expense. You're probably broke by now."

"The money is really low."

"Well, raise some more. Your contract with the investors is for no more than $200,000, you have a long way to go."

"The investors will be pissed. They were expecting the film to cost $150,000 and it's now up to $165,000."

"You can't do it for that! That's turning out to be not a reasonable estimate! This is a good movie! It's not five guys with a hand-held video camera walking around in the woods!"

"It's not *Blair Witch*." Paul answered promptly. "*Blair Witch* was five guys with a hand-held camera walking around the woods."

"If you don't have the money, raise it. You can. Even a hundred dollars for a cheap meal at a crucial time will make a huge difference. Then you won't run into this kind of shit."

Paul pauses, thinking. "Hmm ... I can take some from post-production. Who knows? The costs there might be less."

"And then raise more if you need it then. We're only talking a few thousand at the most. What's that in the film industry?"

Later, at Paul's place, when I was talking about jumping in and helping to pack up the grip and lighting stuff, Doug said, "In most cases that would be a real no-no."

Paul said, "Yeah, they would jump at you, 'Don't touch that light!'" He acted it out by jumping at me, grabbing my arm and yelling right in my face. I laughed. "I'm not kidding," he said. "People are often very protective about their jobs."

"Well, that's kind of how I thought it went."

At home the guys had a little snack and Doug told us science fiction tales. He's writing a science fiction book.

"Oh, I'd love to read it. I love science fiction."

I went to sleep with my head filled with marvelous images from my science fiction past.

After waking up late and getting our gear together, we're in the car again, driving to a different section of Sable Ranch for a night shoot. During our last shoot there, there was a porno being shot in another part of the ranch, Aisha had said. Stas, Doug, Paul and I are driving together and Paul puts on *You Broke My Heart* on his car stereo. Stas says that the trailer for the movie should have this song over the whole thing. Paul agrees. Doug is watching dailies on his laptop, holding it up so it is out of the sun.

Paul and Doug discussed Jeff wrapping early last night. "He panics and makes these blanket decisions when there are other options. It happened with the parking at Speakman's too. He saw no parking on one side of the street and said, okay, we need to find another location. There was parking on the other side."

"Or around the corner."

Then Paul suddenly tells us about this guy who ran the stockroom at USC during Paul's time as a student there. He went crazy and chopped his whole family up with an axe except his little boy and then shot himself.

Shortly after arrival, a new PA named Matt and I are dispatched to catch more bugs for the nature shots we couldn't get to the other night. We catch a cricket, a big black spider (I didn't catch the spider, I am afraid of spiders) and find a cocoon, and we are all astounded when Matt actually catches a mouse.

I'm walking by with a cup full of bugs and I pass Ailee and Marc, who seem to be engaged in some kind of freaked out conversation.

Ailee is saying, “My toolbox just got run over by a car!”

“What? Oh my God!”

They both look down at a cracked cheap plastic toolbox and a mushed binder ground into the dirt with the metal rings squished into oblongs.

“My binder too!” Ailee exclaimed, hands flailing. “This is the whole film. Right here. Who did this?”

“Ailee, it was me,” Mark confessed straightforwardly.

“My binder got run over. This is the whole film, do you realize that? Everybody needs to take a breath and assess the area, how can you not see this?” Ailee is one step away from hysterics.

“Ailee, it’s fine, it just needs to be moved to a new binder. I’m sorry your notebook was by the front wheel of a car.”

I move out of earshot, still exploring for bugs. I come upon what looks like an old movie set, a short railroad track entering into a mock wooden tunnel or mine shaft. Flies swarm around me. It’s quiet up here, and hot, even though it is 6 pm.

I entered the tunnel and it smelled musty, like soaked, weathered wood and darkness. It ended at the edge of a hill, which was dug out a short distance to admit it. Rocks and piles of dirt line the tunnel’s sides. I looked around but no bugs were apparent. Upon exiting, the surrounding mountains, so sculptured with v-shaped ridges running down their rugged, handsome sides, stood proud in the distance. Little yellow flowers on long stalks grew out of the rocky, rubble-strewn ground. Some weathered metal mill parts and a wooden ramp stood ten feet away. A high brushy hill stood behind the set. I thought I smelled the nearly decayed, cloying scent of a small dead animal when the wind hit right.

Another old, wood structure stood to the left with warped, pressed board, uncoated floors and tarpaper rubble here and there. The roof was a tin grating and there were holes where windows could have been, a broken pane of glass with the frame still around it propped up against a wall. There is a type of old west magic lurking here that brings out the Huckleberry Finn in me. I wish Paul had seen this. He is busy filming by the lake.

Heading back to the lake from base camp, which is shortly down a dirt path, I brought water to the filming crew and was picked up by Ivan and driven down. I hear that the $700 first aid kit and the fan were found, right where we left them. I sat next to Aisha, who had Cheez-Its

and couldn't wait to get out of the hot car, puffing and gesticulating, fanning her face theatrically.

"Let me out, I can't stand it!" she exclaimed.

I looked over at her, a little amused, then broke into a wry grin. "Why are you wearing corduroys in the desert?"

"Shut up."

I disembarked and still had my eye out for bugs as I walked around the new area. We start to film some of the bugs on a tree branch. I unwittingly became a bug wrangler. I placed a black caterpillar on the branch and Doug had to hone in on it and I kept picking it up and putting it back where it started until Doug situated himself with the camera. I realized I was in Teo's territory and apologized and gestured for him to take over, but he said it was okay and I kept playing with the bugs.

The next shot was a black beetle which moved pretty fast and went out of sight on the branch before we could get a good shot, so I moved it to the ground and Doug crouched down with the eyepiece of the camera perpendicular to the ground and dragged the camera in a spastic, shuffling crouch in the dirt to keep the beetle in the frame. I discreetly observed his crazed, intent countenance in juxtaposition to what, objectively, was an awkward, ridiculous task. The guy would do anything to get his job done, and get it done well.

"That's what happens when you don't get SAG bugs. They don't hit their mark," Doug grinned, ruffled but composed after his mini-ordeal.

Along the path to the lake, Matt was nearly backing into the water to let a big white van go by.

"Let's find a way to just chill a little ...We need comic relief. Everyone's a little tense," Aisha suggested.

I stopped by Amber's setup and she brought out a tiny little doll that was five generations old to show me. It looked precious and weathered. She said that her house burned down when she was seven and she had no preserved memories from her childhood. Her dad's coin collection survived and other family members, especially her grandparents, were able to partly replenish the memorabilia much to her relief.

I just overheard that Ailee's computer had coffee spilled on it, a whole cup, a couple days before. *No wonder she's freaking out as her equipment gets destroyed by people's carelessness, piece by piece.*

Paul is setting up by the lake for the ritual scene in which Gina slices Jeremy's finger and collects the blood for her experiments. Teo showed him fake blood that he could siphon up with a clear, pliable dropper and drip it out slowly from behind Jeremy's finger. The three actors, Samantha, Dalton and Marina, sit on a green blanket and Paul carefully arranges candles around them and provides a first aid kit for the scene. Samantha is wearing the little teardrop garnet necklace that I provided as a prop that looks like a drop of blood.

As I wait for Aisha to find me tweezers so that I can take a splinter out of my finger, I notice how beautifully the sun behind the hills makes silhouettes of various shades out of the mountains, like a Japanese Zen drawing. I look over again and Martine is taking a still photo of the scene. *I have to go camping soon. It is somehow tied to my life force, my spirit.* My mind goes back to my illness and the simple, visceral knowledge that I must not wait to take advantage of life and nature.

Paul is showing Samantha how he wants her to cut Dalton's finger. Aisha returns and expertly takes the splinter out of my finger with eyebrow tweezers. My shoelaces and my pants, up to and over the knees, are speckled with tiny little burrs. I think the splinter came from one of them. The finger that Jeremy gets slit is the same finger that I had a splinter in.

I was then brought in as a stand-in, along with Matt and Katie, to light the upcoming scene. Matt told me that he once shot himself in the hand with a bb gun by accident and there's a bb still in his hand and he can sometimes feel it moving around.

Team A is brought in when Doug is satisfied and rehearsals begin.

"Two things. Dalton, don't drink any beer after the first drink. Samantha, the line is acquired *from* not acquired *by*."

The next attempt goes smoothly and accurately.

"Great, great, let's get this and we'll go to lunch..."

At lunch we view some of the dailies with Becky singing in the bar.

"The crew members look like convincing extras and the extras do not," Paul assessed. The hired extras are too unnatural, too self-conscious, while the crew is comfortable in the familiar scene, and it shows.

A new crew member named Tony came up to Paul, and with a charismatic, gregarious energy, started talking to Paul about Bryan Singer and *Inbred*, a short from Paul's USC days that he wrote with Bryan.

When *Inbred* came up Paul stared at Tony in amazement, "What? You know that?"

"Yeah, I've seen it. It's in the film archives at USC."

Tony is a current USC student, who was beside himself with delight to see USC alumni making movies.

Paul mentioned that the lead guy in Bryan Singer's first movie, *Public Access*, killed himself. *Public Access* won Bryan an award at a film festival and jump-started his career. Paul told Tony that Stas and Ethan, his writing partner on *Logan's Run*, and Bryan and he shared a room as students at USC and they were all going crazy and on the verge of killing each other. Paul doesn't know if or when *Logan's Run* is going into production; they've spent a million bucks on it but so what, its budget was $250 million. Bryan's latest movie, *Superman*, had a budget of $205 million.

"We think you put a fake monster in the lake so when we jump in, the head will come up out of the water," Marina declared, as we resumed preparation on the set after lunch.

"A what?" Paul looked over at her with innocent blue eyes, pulling his attention away from something else.

"A monster."

His eyebrows darted up and he started with a mischievous bounce. "Who said anything about fake?" Everyone in earshot laughs. "No, no," Paul says, with exaggerated assurance, "we didn't do anything like that, no."

"Okay, ready, bring in the blood!" Shawn's voice carries into the buzz of conversation.

"Let's have the beaker that has the blood in it already," Paul says as he looks over his shoulder.

Kevin has a light meter, which he let me try; I pressed the button and saw the light reading pop up. I smile at him like a delighted kid who was allowed to try a new toy.

"Okay, rehearsal's up!" Shawn bellows.

"If we're going to do a rehearsal then we should use one without the blood in it," Teo interjects.

"No, no, we want the actual blood," Paul clarifies, undistracted by the interjected request.

"Here, let me get that out of there ..." Aisha steps in. There is a spot of blood on the beaker, which she wipes off.

Gina goes through poses of slicing Jeremy's finger.

"Is that how you were always holding your finger?" Paul inquires, inspecting their every movement. "It needs to be a little more up ... that's nice."

"Okay, everybody settle..."

"Okay, and ... action!" Paul's magic words bring complete silence from everybody not in front of the eye of the lens, and complete attention from the actors.

Paul darts over to the actors as soon as the scene is finished. "Okay what ... It was empty? Let's try to fill it a little more. Samantha, how much is in there, can I see? ... Okay, fill it a little more ... Why is the color different?" He turns to Marina as the art department finishes up the preparations. "Did you see *The Lord of the Rings*?"

"Yes."

"Remember the gatekeeper outside the mines of Moria?"

"Yes."

"That's what's in the lake."

"Stop it." She smiles, but involuntarily glances behind her at the water.

"Now she's all scared," Samantha teases.

This is kind of a surreal scene in the night, a group of people intently bent over a lighted area, the juxtaposition of the artificial light in the woodsy dark surreal like a mixture of moon exploration and a Fellini film somehow. The lighted area on the blanket is such a warm light and there is such cold white light dotting the distance circling the lake. We are under a large overhanging tree, the warm light shining on a cluster of faces, too warm to be natural in this dark forest night. One of the branches hangs into the water on the right. There are fish in the water that know you're there when you walk out onto the wooden, 20 foot dock. Jennifer and Jeremy are going to jump in. They tested the depth of the water and it is deep enough to be safe. Swimming was approved by the Sable Ranch management. Paul is going to jump in too to show the actors that he wouldn't ask them to do anything he wouldn't do himself.

"Check the gate! On a good gate the cover is on Jeremy."

Preparations begin for a shot of Jeremy chugging beer. There can be no brand names showing on the beer cans, or anywhere, for that matter, so the art department tried first covering the cans with metal tape. When that turned out too fake looking and tampered with, Teo tried spray painting them silver. This looked much more believable.

Following the beer chug is the scene when Dalton and Marina are to jump in.

"I'm the only girl ... you go too!" she said to me, trying to recruit me.

"I'll be your body double. You run up the dock, and cut ... and I'll jump in," I joke.

"Okay everybody, whoever doesn't need to be on set now get behind the grip truck!" Shawn orders. "We're doing this take once, so when we're rolling, we go straight through!" Everyone is quiet, poised. "And rolling rolling!"

The actors begin the scene, then throw off their clothes and jump in, Jeremy first, then Jennifer. Jeremy says, "It's cold," and Jennifer emits a squelched scream when she hits the water.

"Okay, splash around ... closer to the dock, get closer to the dock, please!" Paul calls out. "Now splash around ... good ... cut!" Then he begins taking his clothes off. "Now it's my turn."

I was worried about Paul getting chilled and getting sick, but he's doing it because he wants his actors to trust him and if I were in his place I would do the same thing. He rips off his clothes and jumps. From behind the grip truck Michel tears into the scene in boxer shorts and jumps too. The four of them splash around and Stas gets it on video. Everybody cheers wildly.

The night is cool enough to be shivering when getting out of a cooler-than-temperate lake. I am among the group that runs up with towels and blankets. Marina and Dalton are done for the night. They run into the heated van. Samantha readies herself for her next scenes.

I saunter up to Jeff after the spectacle is over. "How you doin'?"

"Good. How are you doing?"

"I'm good. How can you drink that?" I say, indicating his Rockstar energy drink with my eyes. "I drank about a fifth of one and I was like hmmmmm ..." I made a buzzing noise and bugged my eyes out. "But I'm a wimp, though."

"You are no wimp," Jeff said, with respect in his voice.

Stas came over, placidly listening to the conversation.

"I'm a caffeine wimp," I smiled.

"We're getting ready for round two," Jeff joked, meaning a second jump in the lake.

"My role is in the hot desert, not in the cold pool," I replied.

"Yeah, we're trying to find a backup."

"I used to hike in Red Rock Canyon outside of Vegas in 100 degree weather. I have three layers on now ... and look at him." I pull at Stas' t-shirt. "He's in short sleeves. I have three layers on."

Jeff finishes his drink and gets a second. "My money's on Maria."

Paul received an e-mail from Jesse Eisenburg this morning saying that he just got cast as one of three starring roles in a film with Richard Gere. He'll happily pitch *Something Happened* to Richard the whole time. It is Thursday, June 15, and we are back at a different part of Sable Ranch.

Paul says that two days ago, that run-in at The Smell was caused because our security guard insulted their security guard/bouncer by calling him a name that was an ethnic slang, and now they want to sue Life on Mars, LLC. *Oh my God. Now their reactions make more sense.* They probably told someone about the incident and were advised, "Hey, movie companies have a lot of money, you should sue." But Jimmy says they can't, they have to take it up with the agency that employed the guard. Besides, Life on Mars, LLC doesn't have any money.

Sable Ranch is something like 200 acres. We saw a plane wreck and a whole weathered old west town in another section of the ranch as we drove by. Another film crew for a movie called *Lake Dead* is filming in another part of the ranch today.

As the cast and crew were converging at the ranch, an RV hit a phone line, big accident, and traffic is backed up so the extras and some of the crew are late this morning. Consequently, preparations for the first scene are moving along slowly.

"I asked for an apple box to be brought down twenty minutes ago," Doug growled. "They're not even aware that there is a call time ..." I am hearing this over Michel's walkie-talkie as I ride down the dirt path with him to the pond. The pond is natural, with tall reeds growing in the shallow water to camera left. There's an old, dilapidated boathouse barely hanging together to the right on the far end of the pond. The pond is smaller than the lake, but there may be unseen marshy areas behind the reeds.

The swan wranglers are here with the live swan, Miss Scarlet, who struts around preening. She doesn't like to be touched at first but comes around to affection like a prima donna princess. The trainer says she will take fifteen or twenty minutes to settle down.

When a mob of boys arrive on the scene, there's suddenly a running and exploring boy-energy everywhere. Paul amasses the boys, and they, along with Paul, get instructions from the swan trainer.

In the scene, a bunch of boys stone a swan to death.

"The noise won't bother her as much as the throwing things," the trainer says. There are foam rocks that are spray painted gray to throw at the swan. It's decided that Gary will do the throwing himself after the scene with the boys is shot, with mimed rocks. Swans seem to be kind of skittish. This is not lost on Paul or Doug.

"Okay, this box is your pretend swan right now, there is no line up yet ..." Paul is working with five boys but, unbeknownst to them, he's only going to use three in the shot. He chooses the three oldest and positions them to camera left near the pond, then places the other two to camera right. He's making them all feel involved even though they won't all be in the shot.

He has them all throw rocks on cue.

"I'm worried they're all going to move around and block the swan," Doug troubleshoots.

"They actually tend to be a little stiff, just picking up rocks and throwing mechanically," Paul said. He mimes a robotic rock-throwing motion.

"Okay, let's see what happens," Doug turns back to his camera.

Paul goes over to the boys and instructs them further on their throwing style.

"Okay, ready for rehearsal," Shawn prods. "Everybody settle!"

"And ... action!"

The trainer takes out the swan and begins to arrange her and calm her down. Just then a car drives up in the dirt lot.

"Cut!"

"Now is not a good time, if we have to let him through, we'll do it, but otherwise ..." Shawn says, protective of the shoot. The car waits.

The trainer, Gary, a woodsy-looking gentleman in his sixties, dressed in jeans, collared t-shirt and gray baseball cap that says "Phil's Animal Rentals," pets the swan and calms her down.

One of her legs is tied with a piece of rope that Gary holds. He then steps away, still holding the rope.

On action, the swan rears up and loses a feather. The boys mime throwing rocks.

"That was good," Doug says.

"Check the gate," says Shawn, true to form. "That was great. Ready to roll on a good gate."

Gary goes over and comforts the swan. She sits with her neck resting partly on her body, head up.

"The trainer played with the swan for two days so it's tired and worn out. That's all you can do, he says. There's no training with swans," Paul tells me, looking over at Miss Scarlet.

The flies continuously buzz around. Most people hardly notice them any more except for Martine and Aisha.

"Okay, rolling rolling!"

On action, the swan does some stumbling motion that Paul likes a lot. The rope on her leg is pretty well hidden. Gary tugs on it softly.

"Good, it looks like it's dying. That was really good!"

Then there is a shot of fake stones hitting the swan, whose neck is in the most amazing position resting along its back, thrown by Gary off to the side. One take and that's done too. Gary picks up the swan, who cranes her neck and paddles a little in the air before she calms down, and carries her away, the rope still tied to her leg.

Paul cheers Miss Scarlet as she's carried away to the truck. "There goes Miss Scarlet, a great actress!"

And she was great, a one-take wonder.

Next, Teo brings out a stuffed swan, which looks quite fake, but he positions it according to Paul's instructions on the edge of the pond. "Sorry. That's all I could find," Teo apologizes.

Paul continues to talk and Teo continues to position the stuffed bird. Doug looks over the camera, then into his lens, then over the camera again.

"The main problem right now is, why isn't its head on the ground? I need its head on the ground, it looks fake," Doug says, somewhat intolerantly.

"I'm trying. It won't go down." Teo wrestles with the bird, sloshing it back and forth in the muck.

"You can put some ground under its head if it won't go down."

Teo positions some dead weeds under the stuffed bird's head.

"There, look at that, isn't that comfy?" Doug peers into his camera lens. "Okay, now jiggle it around a little, like it's dying."

Teo shakes the bird. It looks like a stiff, fake toy being shaken by an art department guy.

"No, that doesn't work. Try shaking it in small spurts," Paul coaches.

Teo jostles the bird, then stops, then jostles again.

"No, like this ..." Doug pops out from behind the camera and goes over to Teo, grabs the bird, and shakes it in controlled but vigorous bursts to try and simulate death throes. Then he goes back behind the camera as Teo mimics what he did.

Doug peers over his camera again. "Didn't you say you had a fake wing? Bring that out and try flapping it above the swan."

Teo retrieves a swan's wing with metal wires sticking out of the large end. He holds it where a wing should be (the stuffed swan's wings are folded into its sides) and flaps it up and down.

"Can you flap the wing closer to the body? It looks detached." Teo does. "No, it's still not right. Can you flap the wing more sideways, not so up and down..."

Teo flaps the wing every which way, growing more and more desperate.

"Now shake the bird too!" Doug orders, anticipation in his voice.

This whole thing is going down with the utmost seriousness. Teo is getting all muddy, crouching in the muck and flapping this silly stuffed swan, feathers flying off of it as he bashes it around, arms pumping, on the muddy shore. The bird is becoming a muddy mess.

Something like a half hour has gone by and we are already late because the boys were delayed due to the RV accident. I roll my eyes. *Come on guys. It isn't working. The shot is going to be, what, two seconds? It still looks fake, can't you see that? Just shoot it.*

Shawn paces by, shaking his head.

"How does this rate? Is it the slowest movie of all time?" I ask him, half joking.

"I've worked on about 40 films and I've never seen a movie shot this slow."

"Oh, really?" I raise my eyebrows in surprise, even though I knew that Shawn had worked on a lot of low budget indies. I was aware that Paul and Doug were aiming at making a film that looked as elegant as a Michaelangelo Antonioni film on about one twentieth of the

budget. This takes time. If you take money away, you have to take extra time. You can take less time if you have the money, but you can't take both money and time away and still have a movie of good quality.

Shawn explains, "If you did that on most movie sets, take hours to light it, you would get in trouble. Most films are shot ... bam bam bam! Off of one shot, on to the next. The longer it takes, the more money it costs, that's the bottom line." He says that he is sensitive to Doug's needs, but it is his job to keep things moving smoothly along. Without his eye on time, they may not complete their designated footage by the end of the day.

Meanwhile, they are shooting a close up of the dead bird.

"Okay, now just shake it in one burst. Shake its head."

"Looks like we got it. All of it," Paul says.

Shawn sighs with relief. So do I.

"The live bird did better than the dead one!" I laugh.

"Camera baby leg, 12mm," Shawn echoes Doug.

We are back up by the man-made lake. Grip and electric start pulling out the large boxes of plugs that look like car batteries with electrical outlets coming out of them. Thick, half-inch black cords are taped together and plugged in, then slinked under the forest floor debris like techno-snakes. The plugs at the ends of these snakes, inserted into the box's side, are about 4"x4". The stands and lights all start appearing again, amidst calls of "striking" when a light is lit and "hot points" as stands are carried like lances. Many crew are grumbling and hungry because the Crafty food didn't seem to make it back up the hill.

Shawn is on the walkie-talkie five minutes later, "Hey, do we have any Craft service down at base camp?"

"Yeah, let's get some veggies down here," Tarina pipes up.

It turns out that Michel had taken the Crafty vehicle to run a short errand without bothering to unload it first. There are more grumbles buzzing around.

The first AC is sitting by the camera, switching it on and off. Shawn is telling me about a spiritual film production in Ashland, Oregon. It's apparently run by a man named Steven Simon who made films called *Theresa* and *Conversations with God*.

Doug instructs some of the grips on how to use the dimmers, how to make them blink intermittently. They are boxes without walls, metal boxes, with what looks like a black, silent motor encased in them. Shawn is doing a great job of persisting that he wants this next shot by lunch. His persistence pays off.

At lunch, Paul and Stas were in their familiar, rapid-fire joking mode. It was like pulling teeth to get Stas to come to the set at first but, true to form, once he came one day, he caught the bug and has been here every day since.

"Another day on Mars," Stas says, matter-of-factly.

"Yeah, what if we just shine a flashlight up in the air and that's Mars. Who needs the special effect," Paul replies without missing a beat.

"Yeah, and you could see your silhouette standing there holding it." Stas makes big, staring eyes and feigns holding a flashlight on himself.

"And what if Gina wakes up and it's all just a dream."

"It's the swan's dream," Stas laughs.

Paul said that Teo slept here overnight and watched the stuff and didn't eat because the food had disappeared. *Poor guy. First he sleeps outside and doesn't eat and then has to spend the next morning wallowing in the mud with a dead bird. That's not exactly the vision you'd have in your head of show biz. Give the guy a gold star.*

Preparations for the sex scene are beginning to take place. White and black rectangles are positioned on stands at seemingly random angles. They are everywhere, close to a dozen of them, a weird installation piece out of place in the middle of the woods.

"Okay, everybody back up. If you don't need to be on set, please back up to behind the big tree, we need some privacy here," Shawn waves everybody back.

I suddenly find myself not needed, possibly for the very first time. I sit on a rock with my back against a tree and doze on and off.

After this, we shoot Samantha and Trevor sitting on the dock with their feet in the water, looking at the night sky. A fish comes up and touches Samantha's foot and she screams and laughs at herself. *The monster in the lake gets you back for laughing at Marina, ha ha!* Then there were shots of fire and sky.

I got a blanket for Paul and he stands there wrapped in it looking like a Jedi knight in the eerie changing cold-to-warm light that the lighting crew created.

"It's four in the morning and none of these people are at home asleep because I wrote something," Paul said, pensively. *That is true,* I thought. *At four in the morning, you get a glimmer of real possibilities, of the holes in time and space you can just step into and make a totally different life than is offered on the surface. Because he wrote something, the lives of all these people are changed. They have an experience that will remain part of who they are for the rest of their lives, long after they say goodbye to Paul. Because he wrote something, Paul will change everyone who sees this film, in a small, humble way, he will add an experience to them. We make choices, all the time we're making choices, and these choices define our lives, whether we're happy or unhappy, fulfilled or not. One by one these choices add up to a life. We could do whatever we want, if we are clever enough to keep the eyes that see that we can. Not in a silly way, like travel to every country in the world or own five houses or that kind of nonsense way of thinking of it, but we can be something, be something real. We can choose to be something real, follow those little voices that draw us with desire to some things and repel us from others, and show this integrity as who we are.*

We stood there, brother and sister, side by side, gazing at the stars.

Chapter 12

Playing God With No Money

I woke up on Paul's floor after a decent sleep. Doug left before us to light the new location. Paul and I went to Erewhon for a tonic. Then we picked up Stas and rushed out to the shoot.

"The director of *Men, Women and Dogs* says to keep everybody moving, your actors, everybody, don't let them sit down. You'll get great performances that way, he insisted," Paul was saying. "And he never left his seat and yelled 'cut' from the monitor."

"Yeah, like you don't need to get performances. You can fix them in post." Stas banters, "Like Bryan, 'Hey Jason, fix everything ... meahhhh,'" he drawls as he breaks into a caricaturish imitation of Bryan Singer yelling at his assistant to fix everything for him. Those guys are always roasting each other.

Paul laughs, "Ha ha! Any aggressive director is Bryan to you ..."

We pass a big, blocky building that has a large sign that reads "Office of the Assessor."

"What is that?" asks Paul.

"I don't know, some creepy weirdo," Stas stares out the window. There's a water slue with water flowing down the nearby hillside.

"*Crash* is like *Congo*," Paul states definitively. *Congo* is the quintessential bad movie for Paul and his group, and they held an event called Congo Night for several years running in which everybody would bring the worst, most formulistic Hollywood movie they found that year and

they would all watch them and vote for a winner. "Someone who has no business tackling that deep an issue looked some stuff up on the internet and *Crash* is what came out."

They both snicker at their histories.

"I fell in love with Amyyyyyy..." Paul abruptly erupts in a grotesquely whining voice.

"Who said that?" Stas asks.

"Dr. Reed. He fell in love with this stupid, obviously mechanical chimp. Remember how obviously mechanical the chimp was? Mea mea meahhhhhhh..." Paul frenetically mimed a robot with stiff arms out moving up and down.

We pass by where Miss Scarlet, the swan from yesterday's shoot, lives. "There she is, right there, Miss Scarlet Johanswan."

We arrived at a high school baseball field and parked nearby. The day grew hotter and hotter, topping off at 100 degrees, I found out later. Martine is fanning herself with some papers and complaining. *Wow, I am going to be in the desert in a heavy suit in a couple days and this is the weather? You think you have something to complain about?* Aisha has a photo shoot at 10 am tomorrow morning and she can't leave. Call time was 6:30 pm, which means that quit time is, most likely, 6:30 am. Paul has synched the lyrics to *You Broke My Heart* to his footage of the song and is showing it around. He throws some baskets with Jeff in the school's gymnasium.

"Wow," I marvel. "I don't think I have ever seen Paul throw a basket."

A little later Ailee is throwing baskets and I go try and am better than I thought. I make baskets from behind the line. Not bad for a five foot tall hobbit.

Michel is doing some amazing yoga moves on the lawn and Jeff is throwing $100 bills at him. He teaches me the crow's position and I hold it for a few seconds. While I am there, on my head, knees on my braced elbows, Shawn's voice rings out over Michel's walkie-talkie requesting that I report to be a background extra for the outside night club scene.

I got changed to be an extra hanging out outside the club. I needed a fancier shirt and didn't have one so Martine gave me one of Samantha's to wear, along with a pair of her flip-flops. I stood outside by a doorway talking to Chris, who was smoking a cigarette, or pretending to, because he doesn't smoke.

"Hey, what is it, $10 a cigarette, I think." That's the bump extras normally get paid to smoke a cigarette on screen.

We stand there talking, then he throws down his cigarette and crushes it with his foot, making a gesture with his head for me to follow him. I follow him out of the shot. We do this over and over again while the camera follows Marina out of the club talking to Dalton about death and knowledge. The lighting for the shot, as well as the scope of the shot itself, was complicated and took a long time ... what a surprise. I drank two bottles of water just standing there.

When we broke for lunch in the gymnasium, we had a great make-your-own Mexican buffet, a welcome change from the melting candy of the Crafty table. A basketball game began; Production 2, Grips 0.

I began reading a script of a pirate film that Chris is involved in along with Martine, called *The Green Pirate*. It is a comedy about pirates on a ship, written in an innovative, intelligent, slapstick way.

The baseball field that Marina runs into lies in front of a high school. The high school is set up more like a mini college campus, with classroom doors all in a row, each leading outside, like a motel, even. Palm trees dot the grounds and more of the inviting, green hills are in the distance.

It's strange to be in a high school gym again, fiddling with a basketball, changing in a locker room. It's not unpleasant, just surreally reminiscent. We are shooting the scenes where Jennifer is contemplating transformation and death with Jeremy. Floodlights and white screens frame the actors sitting on the steps, and the equipment can't be seen even though the framing is straight on due to the fact that they hang over like the extended arm of a road crew flagger holding a flag, leaving the shot of the two actors in the center free and clear.

There have been people lounging on blankets on the grass or in the gymnasium all during the shoot, spreading out a blanket and creating their own little space, one, two or five people clustered together.

It's a picture wrap this morning for Dalton and Marina. Paul said that he knew there was no question that Dalton would get the part after Paul heard him read two words. When Marina came in to read on the first day of auditions, he thought that she could totally do Jennifer and then no one else came in that he felt that way about. And the same thing happened with Samantha. No one else came in for the whole rest of the auditioning that Paul felt was as good for both parts.

Paul gets pushed around on a little cart with wheels lying on his stomach. "Oh sweet lord," Stas comments.

Marina is so sad to say goodbye that she cries. She hugs us all tearfully.

The hills on the way home are strangely scalloped, like cat's paws. By the time we got home I wasn't feeling well at all. I hadn't been eating as well as near the beginning of the shoot, eating some sugar snacks and Cheez-Its and that sort of junk food in the middle of the day. We went immediately to bed. I had to get ready in stages, laying immediately down, then getting up and putting on my pajamas and laying down again, then getting up and brushing my teeth.

We slept until about 3 pm, which was not unreasonable since we went to bed after 8 am. Paul got up for a while and then went back to bed and slept until 7 pm. I got tired just talking on the phone making my Saturday phone calls. I did our week's laundry and planned to go back to bed as early as I could sleep. Paul and Doug went out to dinner and I stayed home to rest and read and finish the laundry. When they came back, we discussed when we were to get up on Monday.

"How long does it take to get there?" Doug asked, efficiently planning ahead as always.

"An hour, maybe a little more. An hour and fifteen minutes."

"Then we should get up at four," I figured. We all smiled and looked at each other. Paul snickered with the awareness that we were doing a crazy thing.

"It just shows you how insane this is," Paul voiced it out loud.

"I really wanted to sleep a couple more hours but forced myself to get up so I'll be more on a normal sleep schedule," Doug said.

"I just sleep whenever I get tired," Paul said.

This says something about their distinct personalities.

"But you don't want to get to sleep at maybe midnight and then have to get up at 4 am to be somewhere," Doug stated reasonably.

"Yes, I agree, anything but that experience," I chuckled.

The photo Paul showed me of the alien head that I would be wearing had eyes that evoked the convex image of the eye-lake in my vision. We watched clips of the movies *Contact* and *Enemy Mine* for ideas of alien landscapes for the alien scenes to be shot in the desert on Monday.

Ah, the desert, I thought. *My austere and beautiful friend. You will be my home once more. I am the life on Mars.*

I woke up at noon after sleeping nearly twelve hours, feeling worlds better.

Paul, Stas and I go to Erewhon for a tonic and lunch. Paul looks through the tonic menu.

"Wow. These are such great names for sci fi characters ... Astragalus. I am Astragalus," he says, delighted. "Tocotrienols. Cordyceps." He rattles them off in a dark superhero voice.

Randy recommends coriolis, agaricus 12 capsules, reishi and cordyceps.

As we are waiting for our tonics, Paul tells me that Ailee, Katie and Martine live in one apartment by USC and Chelsea and two other girls had their own rental too.

Full of good, healthy food, we went back to Paul's apartment and Stas set up his video camera for an interview with Doug. I had picked up an LA Weekly with *Superman* on the cover so all the jokes between Paul and Stas are about *Superman*. The interview with Doug is involved and professionally set up.

Doug tells the camera that he started in theater and worked on 60 plays before retiring from theater in 1988 and going into film. He's an experienced gaffer and has worked on movies from micro budget to $80 million. He has been the Director of Photography on seven films.

After the interview, Doug looks up the forecast tomorrow for our shooting location and says it is going to be 112 degrees. My mouth drops open and my eyes get big.

"Oh, no, it's my mistake. I was in the wrong place. It is going to be 96 degrees!" Doug corrects himself.

My mouth closes but my eyes don't get any less big.

Paul says, "Okay, we really have to think this through. We need to have them in the suits then out of the suits and in the air conditioned van ..."

Stas, one of the four aliens along with me, says, "I don't care. I'll just do it. I'll suffer for someone else's art, not my own, though," he jokes. "Sweet lord."

There's a feeling of brainstorming, of creativity, bouncing around between us. Stas and I began asking questions and were handed diagrams illustrating the structure of the alien shots by Doug. *Behind this closed door are three people who are going to get up before four in the morning on a Monday to visit an alien planet. That alone is magic. Lots of other doors exist that don't lead there. There are lots of closed doors in this world that don't open onto that.*

My alarm went off at 3:45 am and I washed myself down with a face cloth. That's as clean as I needed to be; I'll give myself my own sweat bath later. I needed sleep more than a shower.

Stas, Paul and I pile into Paul's car with all our day's gear and head off down the road.

"Oh, it's towards Vegas," Paul was saying. "Of course it's towards Vegas, that whole area is desert."

"In one more week it will be 10 degrees hotter," I said. I lived in Vegas for almost two years; July and August weather ranges from 95 to 118 degrees.

"Why don't we wait then," Stas jokes.

"Uh oh, it's four in the morning and I'm not wearing fleece," I look down at my light long sleeves.

"Are you ready to go to Alieopolis?" Paul chuckles, looking at me in his rear view mirror.

We continue to joke around and tell stories and then Paul remembered the time when *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* came out on video.

"I remember it was delayed a month and I was counting the days and then it was delayed another month at least before it came to Syracuse and I just couldn't stand it. Then when it finally came I was counting the hours. I was totally obsessed with it and it arrived at the video store and then Mom picked it up and it was there and I couldn't believe how happy I was. And then I remember that the Paulines came over and I had to stop watching it and Mom was calling me and I said, 'Okay, I'm coming,' and I couldn't believe I had to stop but I did, I just needed like 60 seconds to take it out and Mom just kept calling and I remember I had this outburst like, 'Okay! I'm coming!'"

I was shocked that I remembered that episode quite clearly. It made almost as much an impression on me as it did on him.

Paul and Stas had a jam session about 70's films, and burst into song; first *Anything Goes,* followed by the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* musical episode, and they both knew *all the words*, every single minute of it, and that freaked Doug out. They kept singing it in stereo and teasing Doug, who remained calmly horrified.

We begin to see signs that say *Mars* in the town of Adelanto, and they stretch all the way to El Mirage. The El Mirage dry lakebed spreads as a vast, cracked expanse before us. A couple minutes ago, from a slight distance, it deceptively resembled water. We drive onto it, speeding along.

"It's like *Fata Morgana,*" Paul says, looking around. In that film, Werner Herzog shoots in foreign deserts and almost dies. "Aye aye aye aye aye," Paul mutters, as the desert goes on and on. We catch a shimmery glimpse of the crew off to the right and head in that direction. They look very tiny, humbled by the landscape, mountains far away on all sides.

"This is so science fiction," I comment. There is a little fog lingering on the lakebed in the distance. A lone RV is parked on the baked ground maybe a mile away.

"I can already feel myself becoming more alien-like," says Stas. "I'm not a big fan of the desert but this is fucking cool." He pulls out his video camera.

We see our men materializing as distinct shapes. The shapes grow larger, and we come to a stop, making our own parking spot.

Jeff greets us and points to some tire tracks. "This is Michel driving, like, 130 mph about 20 minutes ago."

There are two mysterious white crosses near some brush in the lakebed. In the distance around the lakebed are dotted small clusters of houses, a few in each bunch. Hills can be seen in all directions at varying distances. Michel, Ivan and Jeff were the first three here. We drive slowly around in Paul's car as Doug and Paul scout out a section of desert that meets their needs. An orange windsock on a wooden post indicates an outhouse a few hundred feet away. *Or so it seems to be a few hundred feet; desert distances are deceiving.*

Paul is in his shades and a green baseball cap. It's chilly and right now we all wear light jackets. All except Jeff, who is in a black short-sleeved shirt.

"What's this? Black?" I pull on it. "You're going to regret this later."

He looks down at his shirt blankly.

I used to hike at Red Rock Canyon just outside of Vegas in temperatures up to 100 degrees, and I certainly wasn't dressed in black. What I told him was meant as a prophecy.

"By the way, we couldn't find any back ups," Jeff confesses. "It's just you guys in the suits." *Well, so that's that,* I surrender. *Let's get the show on the road.*

I am dressed in white shorts, a light gray spaghetti strap shirt, and a very light cotton mottled beige and white long-sleeved shirt over it. Yes, long sleeves. And a light colored hat with a brim. The oddly persistent, steady wind whips the long-sleeved shirt in ripples on my body.

The post with the orange flag says "Sailor's Bay." It is on a small brown hump of dirt. Michel follows us around in his car as we do our scouting.

The earth is light brown, sand-colored and packed hard like we are walking on pavement. There is a cracked look to it, tiny ridges everywhere in the surface. Michel takes off back to where the Crafty van is in a cloud of dust. The sun is well over the horizon now in a hazy aura. It is 6:20 am.

"They're going to set up camp down by the bathroom. We're going to shoot here," Paul says. The ground he has selected is even and pristine, unmarred by tire tracks or any human telltale signs. Footprints don't show.

"I know as soon as I get that suit on I'm going to have to pee," Stas says.

I giggle. "That's my fear too."

Our shadows are extremely long. We dance around and play with them on the surreal surface. Last night we were discussing the plans to have the alien sequence shot by lunch at noon, hopefully avoiding the afternoon heat. Other scenes in the desert need to be shot after that. The sun steadily climbs in the sky.

We head back to base camp. Doug and his wheeled black bag recede in the distance, like he's on the moon or something. The rest of the crew is starting to arrive. We see the white passenger van materialize out of the shimmer and barrel on towards us. It comes on in a straight line. Doug sees it and begins to shout, softly at first, then with real anger.

"Hey! I spent forty minutes finding this location and it has no tire tracks! I don't want tire tracks in the shot!" The word 'shot' comes out kind of elongated and hysterical. "Go around! Go around!" He starts stamping his feet and flailing.

I jump out in front of the jumble of people and equipment and start waving my arms wildly in the air and making a flagger's sweeping, pointing motion to go around to the right, around to the right, the wind flapping my clothes like a flag. It takes a while, but they finally veer.

"I usually hate the fuckin' desert," Stas cringes a little, looking around.

"Don't speak about the desert that way," I said, gravely. "Show respect or he'll bite back." I had been caught in the desert a couple times while hiking a little farther out than I thought I'd gone, the day a little hotter than I thought it'd be, a little less water than I thought I had. It was enough.

I squint at the sun. "How many degrees has it warmed up in the past half hour?" *Certainly enough to notice. Way enough to notice.*

"Ten," says Paul.

The art department deposited the alien suits on the baked earth. They were weirder than they looked in the photos I had seen.

"Oh my God, they're so weird! What is that, foam?" I bent down and squeezed one. It indeed felt like a type of pliable, rubbery foam, and they were mottled gray/green in color, a pile of foamy limbs with detached, floppy rubber feet and large, firm rubber helmet heads. They were all slightly different shapes, some larger than others. Tom, Stas and Ethan, Paul's old college friends, along with me, his sister, are going to be in the suits.

Tony was amazed and overjoyed to be witnessing this.

"Oh my God! He's got his friends in the suits! I'm sure he could have had any student or anyone do it just to be in the movie, but no! He calls up his friends! Ha ha ha!" Tony shakes his head in amused disbelief and looks on, bright eyes idolizing Paul and the whole scene before his eyes, an actual movie being made!

It was time to get suited up. I had walked to the bathroom with Stas a few minutes ago, just to troubleshoot the pee thing. I was about to step into mine but the art PA said my big shorts would catch on it so I stripped down to my underwear in front of everybody and climbed in, with help. It was what it looked like, hot, tight foam.

The hands were talon-like pliable rubber gloves and the head was rubber and you could only see and breathe through a slit in the mouth. There was a small generator on site to run fans for heat relief and other equipment.

None of the suits closed in the back. The foam showed cream-colored behind the surface. Paul examined the slits in mine.

"Maybe we can spray paint back here or something, I'm not sure if her back will show." Somebody came behind me and I heard the hiss of a spray can. "That's much better," Paul approves. I amble off into the line of the camera, holding my alien head.

The others had climbed into their suits as well; Tom's was humungous; a great fig-shape with head and tail and short, stubby elephant legs. He could hardly walk. We stood around in the glaring sun and Paul began positioning us.

"Okay, we need to get rid of Tom quickly, he's too big and bulky, so he's going to be the one to fall. Go ahead and walk from there, let's see what this looks like," Paul finishes adjusting our positions and backs off so he can see us in rehearsal. "I'll talk you through it..." he shouts over the wind, "and ... action Stas ... action Ethan ... action Tom ... action Maria ... fall Tom, and turn Stas, a little more, now walk on ... faster Maria, and a little faster ... and cut!"

Rehearsals were all *sans* head. Once we got the rhythm, we had a "helmets on" rehearsal.

The moment I put my helmet on, I realized that it was not a good thing. In a nutshell, I could barely see, hear or breathe. The raging wind was no longer cool, even at eight o'clock in the morning, and it just made things much worse, whistling into the bottom of my alien head and making it harder to hear. We couldn't walk in straight lines because we could see only a slit of moving earth under our feet.

"Cut! You're walking sideways," Paul said.

"I can't see a thing!" I exclaimed. "I only see a tiny slit in front of me."

"Okay, I'll stand in front of you. Follow my voice."

"I can't hear real well either! The wind is whistling in my helmet. You have to talk loud. And we really can't breathe." I had just had pneumonia in April and it's June. I don't consider myself the paragon of breathing health. Though nobody else was really doing any better. Stas was starting to get a little reddish in the face.

They ended up scraping little lines in the packed dirt so that we could follow them through our little peepholes.

"Okay, this is how it's going to go." Paul had us all gather around in a little alien huddle. "I am going to say 'Helmets on!' right before we shoot, then we do a take and I'll immediately say, 'Helmets off!' There will be PAs with water and sunscreen for you, and then we'll quickly prepare for the next take, okay?" We all nod in agreement and disperse back to our marks.

"Okay, helmets on!" Paul yells. We all totally block out the world with our helmets. "And ... action!"

We amble through our sequence. Doug is up on a high ladder, shooting from above.

"Cut! Helmets off!"

Two PAs with water bottles rush over and give us big drinks. They have sunscreen, which I recommend Stas use. Since Martine is standing in front of him, who he finds really attractive, he eagerly accepts.

Doug bounds off the ladder and comes over to me. Doug was perched on a tall ladder and Marc, the AC, is on a shorter ladder next to him and they are running the camera from there. "Maria, this is what you look like." He mimed robotic swinging arms in unison, forward and back.

"Gotcha," I replied. Doug sprinted off.

"Okay, settle, everybody," Jeff says in the distance. *What?* Jeff is serving as Shawn and Paul did some ADing too. Most of the crew was let go for financial reasons and because it was a simpler shoot with no primary actors and no dialogue.

"Okay, helmets on! And ... action!"

I amble along with hanging arms. My breathing sounds to me like Darth Vader. *I feel like a parched alien. I am in character. This is no act.*

"Cut! Helmets off!" We don't have the helmets on for more than 90 seconds at a time.

I rip my head off and breathe deeply. PAs come over with water. They start pouring it into our mouths, over our heads, smearing sunscreen over our noses.

"Wait, don't slosh water on the ground! It will be seen in the shot!" Paul steps in and halts the process. We stand there and watch as in ten seconds the water is completely gone, absorbed into the cracked earth. We look at each other with knowing eyes. *Oh. That answers that.*

Doug meticulously sets us up for each shot. "Okay Ethan, step to your left two steps." He does. "Now back one." He steps back.

After a shot of Tom falling, which he did with an agonized whine, Paul said, "Okay, everybody roll on the ground and get the dirt on your suits," so we all got down and rolled around and had to be helped up. Apparently the eyes on the helmets reflected the sun too much *which, by the way, was way up in the sky by now, blazing away,* and Doug was unhappy with the

reflection. They spray painted the eyes a little and rubbed some dirt on. *It is surreal on this dry lake bed in this suit, it feels like Mars, trudging along there with my hot breath in my face, seeing only a sliver of cracked ground, giddy with heat.*

We are now to stand in a semicircle and raise up our arms to the sky. The temperature has increased exponentially as the morning grew late.

"Helmets on ... and action!" Inside the helmet must be 130 degrees. I've breathed 118, and this is not it. I breathe through my nose and mouth at the same time. My feet are starting to burn from the heat in the ground through the unpadded rubber feet.

We pose and raise our arms and heads.

"Cut! Helmets off!" Paul bounds over. "Okay, Maria, raise your head a little higher next time. Ethan, hands up a little more."

The water bearers come over, pouring water over us and into us, feeding us cool, juicy grapes that taste amazing and feel life-giving. I am soaked inside the suit, sticky and pasty and hot. Stas is totally red in the face. He looks even hotter than I feel, a white rim beginning to appear around his mouth, and Ethan doesn't look much better. The temperature has to be in the nineties.

We prepare for the next take.

"Helmets on and action!" I look up more. "Higher, Maria, higher!" I keep looking up. The helmet is too big, I feel it starting to slip ...

"And cut! Helmets off! What was that, Maria, not that high!"

"My helmet is too big. I felt it loll back, falling against my face. I couldn't help it." *It must have looked really funny, maybe separating from my body.*

"Oh, okay. Let's go one more time!"

"Going again going again!" Jeff echoes.

"Helmets on ... and action!"

We pose one more time.

"Cut! Helmets off! Good, that was good."

We get repositioned in a semicircle facing the other way. I look around and everything swims, I feel detached from my surroundings, like my experience is being fed to me after a slight lag. My eyes scan left and right, amazed as hell at the moment and everything novel that is filling it. I am stepping from one foot to the other, the soles of my feet burning. I am about to

say something, to ask for pads to be put in my feet or something. *Just one more shot. Hang in there. One more shot.*

We pose facing the other direction, arms extended, heads turned towards the sun. Hold a beat, hold ..." And cut! Helmets off!" Paul rushes over with a protective energy. "You're done," he announces, "good job! We got it!"

We shuffle over to the shaded canopy, surrounded by attentive gestures. The shade makes only a minuscule difference in our core temperatures at first. I am peeled out of my suit, blearily. I look down and realize that I am totally soaked, my shirt a completely different color than when I started, and am covered in a white, pasty film. I stare at it, uncomprehending. *What is this white stuff?* It is powder that was put into the suits to make them easier to get into and out of. I am coated in it, and start brushing at it weakly. My shorts are handed to me and I put them on over powdered legs. Grapes and a bottle of water are placed in front of me. Announcements are being made, and I hear my name come up.

"Picture wrap for Maria Todisco."

Everyone in the vicinity applauds. I smile, happy and full of adventure.

It's noon. Lunch is served. It's make-your-own sandwiches with cold cuts and cheese and all the fixins, along with chips and chocolate chip cookies and Klondike Ice Cream Bars, which were a bona fide gift from heaven, much more than any Juicy Nectar bathwater after you've spent a day in an alien suit in the desert. And lots to drink.

We all sang a jolly happy birthday to Stas when Paul happened to mention that it was his birthday. Loni and Stas and Paul were talking about Bryan and Loni said he didn't expect Bryan to be the first one of their group to really make it big.

Ivan looks at me from behind and laughs, pointing.

"What?"

"You have gray spray paint on the back of your shirt, ha ha ha!"

"Hey! Don't mistreat the actors!" I joke, pulling my shirt around to try to see the paint.

Jeff overheard. "Yeah, don't mistreat the actors, I tell him that every morning," he grins. "Don't mistreat the producer, the one who creates the force field, the one who's playing God with no money."

Stas and I, wiped out, briefly doze in the air conditioned passenger van while they were getting shots of the ground and of raindrops (the art department version) falling on the parched earth. As actors, we had this privilege. Teo rigged up a grid of pipes in which he stuck funnels and let the water sprinkle out but it was too heavy a sprinkle and Paul didn't like it. They tried to sprinkle water with their hands and then with water bottles. They finally got the drops done in a believable way.

I saw Paul sitting on a sandbag on a c-stand looking droopy and closing his eyes. I looked around for an empty bottle and found one and filled it with cold water from the melted ice cubes in the cooler and brought it to him and put it on the back of his neck and the inside of his wrists. "I wish I had a sister like that," Ivan said.

The strong desert wind continued to blow and howl all day long. Stas said, "It was like standing in a hair dryer."

"It's 100 degrees, guys," Jeff says, looking at his thermometer.

In the morning we were in our suits at about 7:30 am and remained in them straight until noon as it steadily got hotter and hotter, a four and a half hour sauna. Paul was intent on getting the shots he wanted before it got so hot that someone would pass out or have to get out of the suit. At some intervals, the wind gusts became so strong that we were in a huddle being directed, "Shield your eyes!" by Paul. Then we stood there with our faces scrunched up until it abated.

Stas and I helped pack up the elaborate base camp at the end of the day. Stas got more agitated than I've ever seen anyone get and just wanted to get the hell out of the desert. He almost didn't go to pee because he didn't want to get out of the car as we were leaving and set foot on the desert ground again. On the way home, Doug and Stas were nodding off in the car. We were all getting really giddy and telling each other that our grimy, sorry selves smelled like fish ass and Paul enlightened us with the story of how fish ass got started.

"Well, my friend Ellis wrote *The Better World Handbook* with two other guys, one of whom is named Ross Haenfler. Ellis' mom used to cook these fried dough things that were really hard and gross but she thought of them as this traditional dish and so Ellis was forced to eat them as a kid. Then at Ellis' wedding, Ross tasted them for the first time and just came out and said, 'This tastes like fish ass.' This happened four years ago, and for some reason, I just said it again the other night."

At home Paul and Doug and I all take showers and I talk to Doug about the shoot today and he says he hopes his girlfriend, Deborah, and he and William and I can all meet someday and hang out because we'd all like each other. I said I hoped so too and that this won't be the last film in our lives. Then Paul and Doug turn back to business and discuss getting nature shots tomorrow. Trevor and Samantha are to be driving around in a convertible and naming everything they pass by.

Doug recalls *Freak* missing the deadline for admittance to the Sundance Film Festival. He said it was submitted on the last day and it was sitting by the projector and the projectionist didn't see the box and it wasn't screened.

Right when we were going to bed Paul came and lay on the fold-out couch with me and read me a Neruda poem, "These are only for the most special women in my life." In our eyes we shared the experience of today's specialness too, now added to all the other experiences we've ever shared.

I said goodbye to Paul and Doug as they left about 6 am and then went back to sleep. They are shooting Samantha and Trevor driving around in a car today with minimal crew at base camp in Fillmore. The shoot is winding down. Stas went with them and will be back to take me to the airport. I spent the morning showering and packing.

When Stas picked me up, I told him I wanted to take him to lunch somewhere for taking me to the airport and for his birthday. Wonder of wonders, he chose Souplantation. *We're off to shit-fuck-ass-crap, where all of the food tastes like crap...Well, I'm about to see for myself,* I thought.

We talked a lot about the film and joked about Stas' crush on Martine. The soups turn out to be totally salty and the ready-made salad too sweet, but you can make your own salad and eat garlic bread and muffins and ice cream sundaes, which is what I did.

Then Stas dropped me off at the airport and I sat there in an airport seat with people walking back and forth and the recordings at various gates announcing incremental boarding zones, and felt totally content. I felt content to travel, content with having my black bag with me that had everything I needed for the trip, I had a sports drink...*not fish ass...*and a snack and my bag, and again felt somewhat like a soldier in transit, not having slept enough, being at all those different locations, having all those different experiences. I felt strangely self-sufficient, like I

had the strength to always choose a course of action that beckoned me, whether or not it even ended in death, some final run or another, but sensed that even if a decision felt that way that it would likely be followed by another and another and this was how I wanted to live until it actually did end. I did not want to sustain one experience beyond its time, hold a job for the health insurance or for the paycheck, but enter an experience that I was moved to enter until it was no longer moving, and move on to the next. At what time the end would come, whether it be sooner or later, was in some sense secondary to the flow of life itself, not out of disrespect for life, but out of the deep and utter joy of it. *This is what freedom feels like...*

I fly over snaky rivers, lit up golden and flashing in the slanted sunlight.